ISSN: 1081-8359

OTHER HANDS

The International Journal for Middle-earth Gaming

ISSUE 22

THE BALROGS

ISSUE 22
JULY 1998

In this Issue

Editorial 2
Communication 2
The Balrogs 4
Dwarven Magic 12
Interview 15
The TA 1640 Campaign Facts and Problems 17
Rastarin's Log 21

CONTRIBUTORS
Carl Brodt
Bridget Buxton
Chris Seeman
Chris Tubb
Jason Vester

EDITING
Chris Seeman

PAGEMAKING
Quentin Westcott

ARTWORK
Bridget Buxton
Quentin Westcott
Patrick Wynne

NEXT ISSUE

DRAGONS!

EDITORIAL: ON-LINE

Ack! My brain is reeling from the immensity of it all. I mean the prolificacy of MERP-related sites on the Internet. But most of you probably know this already, since more than 80% of Other Hands' readership enjoys access to the Internet. Why am I telling you this? Because Other Hands now has an all-new webpage which will soon offer a plethora of great stuff you won't find in hard copy. It's not fully operational yet—we're shooting for August 1st—but you can take a peek at it at **http://www.netcom.com/~mrboy/OtherHands/Index.html.** (This URL is temporary, the final version will omit "~mrboy/".) Cramped for space...must move onto intros for this issue...

A couple of months ago I was asked to write the "color texts" (topical mini-essays) for ICE's *Balrog Player Guide* (intended to accompany the not yet released MECCG expansion deck of the same name). In the course of researching various aspects of Balrog-lore, I stumbled upon enough interesting tidbits that I thought I might write up in an organized fashion. This issue's background essay is the result.

But the real feature for this issue is the interview we have been granted by Chris Tubb, designer of Mithril miniatures. Miniatures have traditionally been an important component of fantasy role playing games. It is a facet of Middle-earth gaming that has been hitherto neglected by the pages of this journal. I hope this very interesting conversation will rectify that absence.

In lieu of an adventure scenario, we have for this issue two shorter pieces: one a treatise on game mechanics, the other a collection of campaign ideas for the TA 1640 period. A recent subscriber to OH, Carl Brodt had originally written "Dwarven Magic" as a submission for *Grey Worlds* magazine (which never materialized). I always find it refreshing to read an article that approaches the "Magic in Middle-earth" question from a specific vantage point, in this case, that of a particular race. I hope to see others apply a similar approach to the particular magic of other races or cultures.

For his part, Jason Vester takes on a critical issue for campaign design: what themes or elements are unique to or emblematic of a given temporal setting in Middle-earth. The indeterminacy he finds in many of the MERP modules on the distinctive character of the 1640s is surely grounds for undertaking the kind of exploration of adventure possibilities he does.

And as always, we wrap things up with another episode of Rastarin's Log, in which our heroes run amok with Black Númenórean nasties in Umbar, with more *Star Wars* references a-flying...

Chris Seeman
1 July, 1998

COMMUNICATIONS

Jason Vester:

Congratulations on another solid issue of OH! I truly never expected the next issue to be out on time. A few comments on specific articles follow.

Adventures have always had a very prominent place in OH and, while I do not dispute this position, they have never really been all that useful to me. Many have been rather ordinary stories without purpose, or else lacking in-depth development. I'd much rather read another article on "Magic in Middle-earth" or someone's campaign premise. But in this case, despite my starting bias, I found the adventure remarkably strong, easy to pick up and drop into another setting, and self-contained. Every site and NPC had a write-up, and the illustrations added considerably to the written material. If I had a criticism, it would be this: it's too bad we don't see more original mon-

sters and menaces in M-e. Too often we resort to the familiar (Giant Spiders, Orcs, Wargs, Wights, etc.). Just because JRRT didn't describe it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist! But until I submit an adventure of my own, perhaps I shouldn't throw stones.

The survey results were interesting, but I would encourage you to not give up completely on articles that rested at the bottom end of the scale. An occasional article on M-e computer games, or CCGs, especially if they relate to table-top role playing, would still be welcome.

Keep up the great work, and remember that we all appreciate you.

4250 S. Arville #280
Las Vegas, NV 89103-3726
vester@nevada.edu

Andy Alack:

I thought I would just drop you a line or three so I can say how I've just finished reading all 21 issues of OH — and what a read!! What can I say?

Excellent! And the quality of the material produced increases with each issue. Well done!

Now the praise is over, some thoughts for you. It is with regret I heard from you about the moratorium, but in some respects I can understand ICE's reasons (even if I dislike them). One of your writers to OH mentioned that MERP was more popular in Europe than the US. This, unfortunately, does not seem to be the case. Where I live in England there are around 175,000 people and only one gaming shop (if you exclude Games Workshop) and, according to the owner (whom I know quite well), I seem to be the *only* person in Swindon who buys MERP products. I GM for about three groups which consist of about 10 people in total. I also know of one other GM who uses MERP/RM for about another 4-5 people; so, as you can see, whilst we have the people, it seems we do not have the interest there.

I think, however, that the quality of the MERP product line cannot be matched—the maps are a marvel and Angus McBride's artwork second to none, giving you the impression you re really there. (If ICE produces posters of this and the like, I would be very interested.) If I have one criticism, it is of the internal artwork: it looks too "lumpy," too primitive. I think MERP would have done far better to have employed some of your artists. A great talent, I think, is the author of your last three covers.

The scenarios you produce I really enjoy, and in some respects my poor efforts pale by comparison. Rastarin's log I enjoy immensely—I was in tears after the last issue. Plainly Bridget is a fan of the prince of thieves. I think I should respond with something from Men in Tights: "Unlike other role players I could mention, at least I speak with a English accent."

Lastly, the picture at the back of Issue 20: I am sure I have seen it before, Chris. Were you starring in "America's Mostwanted"(?)!!

Now I would like to offer a rule suggestion for handling Words of Command (WCs), a topic that was originally broached by Dirk Brandherm in OH 10/11. If one recalls Gandalf's shutting-spell on the door of the chamber of Mazarbul (LotR 1.341), the following observations may be made:

- "To do things of that kind [i.e., shutting-spells] rightly requires time (ibid)."
- A WC is precisely that—one word.
- Casting WCs is physically draining.
- A WC harnesses incredible power (truly the sledge hammer, as Brandherm mentions), the use of which can cause structural damage (cf. Gandalf's shattering of the Bridge of Khazad-dûm).

From these I draw the following conclusions:

1) The time taken to cast a *normal* spell should be increased (x2 seems a good ideal, so that a 1st level spell would take 2 rounds to cast, 4 rounds for a 2nd level, etc.).
2) A WC will not increase the damage a spell might do (no super fireballs and the like); rather, it might extend range, strength or duration.
3) In game terms, the strain involved in casting a WC might also carry the risk of the caster loosing something of value (e. g., Gandalf's staff being broken on the bridge).

Practical game mechanics:

1) Decide which spell lists would have WCs. (By all means, let the players have input into this, but in the end, the GM is Eru.) A PC who has access to an approved spell list also knows the appropriate WC.
2) A WC takes 1 round to cast, no matter what the level *effects*. Upon casting it, the spell's level immediately doubles the RR needed to pass it. It costs 2x the normal amount of PPs to cast this spell.
3) The caster loses 1D10 temporary Co points and may cast *no further magic* for the next 10 minutes. The Co points (regained at the rate of 1 point/10 minutes) further strengthen the WC by of the caster's lost Co at a 1:1 ratio.

Example: A 2nd level mage is being chased through Mount Gundabad by several Orcs led by a 5th level Uruk. Though he has the lead, the mage is tiring fast and knows it is but a matter of time before they catch him. Seeing a door in front of him, he rushes through it and slams it shut. Unfortunately, it has no lock. Hearing the Orcs closing in, he decides he has no option but to cast *Magic Lock* (from Unbarring Ways); but he also knows the Uruk should be able to break through this easily, so he opts to use a WC. Since *Magic Lock* is a 2nd level spell, using it as a WC knocks it up to Level 4 RR (probably still to weak to hold them). Groaning at the telling effect of the spell on his body, he looses 8 Co points, 3 of which go to reinforce the spell (thus raising the RR to Level 8 —much more respectable). Using the door to bar the Orcs' progress, he stumbles away from the door, recovering from the ordeal (constitution-wise) some 1 hour and 20 minutes later.

What happens when the spell is broken? If the duration expires there should be no ill-effect; but if the spell is broken by violence, give it a percentage chance of quite literally bringing the house down! If the focus of the spell's power (i.e., the spell adder, PP multiplier, etc.) happens to be destroyed, that should also be factored into the equation.

Incredible as it may seem, this option could technically work using the MERP stats for Gandalf and the Balrog in *Lords of Middle-earth* I (35th and 60th respectively). So, if you use the above suggestion, it would, as in "History," stop the thing!

Yes, I know there are holes. Yes, I still have to put this to the practical test with my own group. But it is a start. Any (civil) suggestions are always welcome. Feel free to send uncivil suggestions as well—I'm not fussy!

63 Ashford Road
Swindon
Wilts
United Kingdom
vas@connect-2.co.uk

THE BALROGS

Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948, USA (chrisl224@aol.com)

In a letter from 1954, Tolkien described the Balrogs as "primeval spirits of destroying fire, chief servants of the primeval Dark Power of the First Age (Let.180)." Balrogs may be regarded as "primeval" in yet another sense, for they were present (in very full detail) already in The Book of Lost Tales (1916-17),[1] when Gothmog led the hosts of Melko against the doomed city of Gondolin. But if the Balrogs were primeval, they were also subject to significant alterations within the evolution of Tolkien's larger mythology. An awareness of these developments can often provide clues to a more accurate understanding of Tolkien's "final" conception of these creatures in The Lord of the Rings and in the (unfinished) literary efforts that followed its publication.

The aim of this essay is to offer a synthesis of the Balrog tradition in this "final phase," making reference to earlier layers where these can help clarify how Tolkien intended it to be read. Since the tradition often raises as many questions as it answers, I have found it convenient to deal with a variety of topics piecemeal. Wherever practical, I reproduce the passages cited, so that the reader will not have to repeat the labor of searching out and assembling disparate fragments.

I would like to express my thanks to Michael Martinez, who read through and critiqued an earlier version of this essay. While he and I may still not agree on all points, I hope I have at least factored in most of his observations.

ORIGIN

In his commentary on the Valaquenta, Christopher Tolkien notes that it is in this story that his father for the first time identified the Balrogs as "primeval spirits" (HoMe X.203).[2] This passage, as it appears in the published *Silmarillion,* reads as follows:

> ...of the Maiar many were drawn to [Melkor's] splendor in the days of his greatness, and remained in that allegiance down into his darkness;
>
> and others he corrupted afterwards to his service with lies and treacherous gifts. Dreadful among these spirits were the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called the Balrogs, demons of terror. (Sil.31)

I believe that the phrase "splendour ir the days of his greatness" alludes to the following passage in the Ainulindalë:

> Some of these thoughts [Melkor] now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. (Sil.16)

While it is possible to read the Valaquenta passage as identifying the Balrogs only (or primarily) with the "others" that he corrupted "afterwards" with lies and gifts, a later passage from *The Silmarillion* suggests that the first kind of Maia is meant:

> And in Utumno [Melkor] gathered his demons about him, those spirits **who first adhered to him in the days of his splendour,** and became most like him in his corruption: their hearts were of fire, but they were cloaked in darkness, and terror went before them; they had whips of flame. Balrogs they were named in Middle-earth in later days. (Sil.47)

It may, of course, be splitting hairs to insist upon too sharp a distinction between the two types of Maiar referree to in the Valaquenta. (Some Balrogs may indeed have been corrupted by lies and gifts *in addition* to being drawn to Melkor's splendour.) The chronological difference, however, is essential for appreciating certain resonances that may obliquely elucidate the nature of the Balrogs; because it *is* possible, if one adopts the view that the Balrogs were "late -comers" to Melkor's allegiance, to read an earlier passage related to the Utumno reference cited above as the inceptive moment of their corruption:

> Therefore [Melkor] gathered to himself spirits out of the halls of Eä that he had perverted to his service, and he deemed himself strong. And seeing now his time he drew near again to Arda....And he passed therefore over the Walls of the Night with his host, and came to Middle-earth far in the north....Now Melkor began the delving and building of a vast fortress, deep under Earth, beneath dark mountains where the beams of Illuin were cold and dim. That stronghold was named Utumno. (Sil.36)

If, on the other hand, the Balrogs began their allegiance before they were summoned to Utumno, before the creation of Arda, the following texts assume significance for interpreting the genesis of their characteristics, inasmuch as these Balrogs-to-be "attuned their music" to Melkor's and "became most like him in his corruption." To begin with, we are told in the Valaquenta that Melkor:

> ...began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things. (Sil.31)

What is interesting about this passage is not Melkor's association with darkness per se, but rather the connection it establishes with "fire" and "burning," and also with the fear that the dark inspires in living things. Here are yoked together the three essential elements of a Balrog's makeup: fire, darkness and terror (Sil.47 cited above). A similar association is to be found in the description of Melkor's *fana* at the close of the Ainulindalë: "...he also took visible form, but because of his mood and the malice that burned in him that form was dark and terrible (Sil.21)." Similarly, when he returns to Arda to destroy the Lamps, the Valar "did not perceive the shadow in the north that was cast from afar by Melkor; for he was grown as dark as the Night of the Void (Sil.36)."

The theme of "destroying fire" is emphasized throughout the First War between Melkor and the Valar. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities (during his momentary repentance, when Ilúvatar revealed the vision of Arda to the Ainur), Melkor "feigned, even to himself at first, that he desired to go thither and order all things for the good of the Children of Ilúvatar, controlling the turmoils of the heat...that had come to pass through him (Sil.18)."[3] In the sequel, of course, Melkor "kindled great fires (Sil.20)," hindering the shaping of the Earth.

While there is no explicit statement that the Balrogs assisted Melkor in the primeval struggle for Arda's formation,[4] the parallel emphasis on fire, darkness and terror between Melkor and those who emulated his discord cannot be accidental. This is significant, as not all of Melkor's allies manifested these three qualities. Ungoliant, for instance, exuded darkness and terror, but was inimical to fire. Only the Balrogs embodied all three elements—and a fourth, that of "might," the coercive use of power denoted by their very name (Melkor = "He who arises in Might;" Valaraukar = "Demons of Might").[5]

To summarize, the Balrogs are those Maiarin spirits who attuned themselves to Melkor's discord in the Ainulindalë and who most closely emulated his own corruption. In their dual embrace of destroying flame and terror-inspiring darkness the Balrogs resembled Melkor more exactly than either Sauron or Ungoliant, and are thus distinguished from the differing themes of evil which these latter came to manifest (for Ungoliant, devouring darkness, for Sauron, sorcery). The Balrogs may or may not have participated in the First War of Melkor and the Valar, but at any rate they first acquired a distinctive presence among the Dark Lord's hosts in his subterranean fortress of Utumno. The association of this site with the origin of the Balrogs in Middle-earth may be seen when Gandalf, on the bridge of Khazad-dûm, names his foe "flame of Udun (LotR 1.344)," that being the Sindarin form of "Utumno."

HISTORY

In the same passage in which Tolkien recounts the building of Utumno, he writes that "Melkor made also a fortress and armoury not far from the northwestern shores of the sea, to resist any assault that might come from Aman. That stronghold was commanded by Sauron, lieutenant of Melkor; and it was named Angband (Sil.47)." Although it is not stated explicitly here, later developments make it clear that at least some of the Balrogs were appointed to this western fortress, since it is from Angband that Balrogs come forth to save their master from the webs of Ungoliant:

> Deep in forgotten places that cry was heard. Far beneath the ruined halls of Angband, in vaults to which the Valar in the haste of their assault had not descended, Balrogs lurked still, awaiting ever the return of their Lord; and now swiftly they arose, and passing over Hithlum they came to Lammoth as a tempest of fire. With their whips of flame they smote asunder the webs of Ungoliant... (Sil.81)

The Valar laid siege to Utumno soon after the awakening of the Elves (Sil.51). "Nonetheless the Valar did not discover all the mighty vaults and caverns hidden with deceit far under the fortresses of Angband and Utumno. Many evil things still lingered there, and others were dispersed and fled into the dark and roamed in the waste places of the world, awaiting a more evil hour...(Sil.51)." Since there is no hint that Melkor made any attempt to re-occupy Utumno after his escape from Valinor as Morgoth, it is likely that, once he had re-established his power in Angband, all of the Balrogs that had survived Utumno's fall would have removed there as well (unless they had been imprisoned beneath the earth by its ruin).

The Balrogs of Angband played prominent roles in the Wars of Beleriand that followed. They served as Morgoth's court guard (Sil.167), a position dramatized in The Lay of Leithian:

> About him sat his awful thanes, the Balrog-lords with fiery manes, redhanded, mouthed with fangs of steel; (HoMe III.296)

Gothmog, Lord of Balrogs, also served as "high-captain of Angband" during the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (Sil.193). Apparently, not even Sauron himself, "greatest and most terrible of the servants of Morgoth," enjoyed that honor (Sil.155-156).

Balrogs are recorded to have made their appearance on five of Morgoth's most critical battle-fields, in the course of which they managed to slay or overcome the greatest of the Elves: Fëanor, Maedhros, Fingon, Ecthelion and Glorfindel. I reproduce here the sections that explicitly mention Balrogs:

DAGOR-NUIN-GILIATH (F.A. 1)

"Thus it was that [Fëanor] drew far ahead of the van of his host; and seeing this the servants of Morgoth turned to bay, and there issued from Angband Balrogs to aid them. There upon the confines of Dor Daedeloth, the land of Morgoth, Fëanor was surrounded, with few friends about him. Long he fought on, and undismayed, though he was wrapped in fire and wounded with many wounds; but at the last he was smitten to the ground by Gothmog, Lord of Balrogs, whom Ecthelion after slew in Gondolin. There he would have perished, had not his sons in that moment come up with force to his aid; and the Balrogs left him, and departed to Angband....but Morgoth sent there more, and there were Balrogs. Maedhros was ambushed, and all his company were slain; but he himself was taken alive by the command of Morgoth, and brought to Angband (SU. 107-108)."

DAGOR BRAGOLLACH (F.A. 455)

"Then suddenly Morgoth sent forth great rivers of flame that ran down swifter than Balrogs from Thangorodrim, and poured over all the plain....In front of that fire came Glaurung the golden, father of dragons, in his full might; and in his train were Balrogs....Thus ended the siege ofAngband...(Sil.l51)."

NIRNAETH ARNOEDIAD (F.A. 473)

"But even as the vanguard of Maedhros came upon the Orcs, Morgoth loosed his last strength, and Angband was emptied....and there came Balrogs.... Gothmog, Lord of Balrogs, high-captain of Angband, was come; and he drove a dark wedge between the Elvenhosts, surrounding King Fingon, and thrusting Turgon and Húrin aside towards the Fen of Serech. Then he turned upon Fingon. That was a grim meeting. At last Fingon stood alone with his guard dead about him; and he fought with Gothmog, until another Balrog came behind and cast a thong of fire about him. Then Gothmog hewed him with his black axe, and a white flame sprang up from the helm of Fingon as it was cloven. Thus fell the High King of the Noldor; and they beat him into the dust with their maces, and his banner, blue and silver, they trod into the mire of his blood (Sil.192-194)."

FALL OF GONDOLIN (F.A. 510)

"At last, in the year when Earendil was seven years old, Morgoth was ready, and he loosed upon Gondolin his Balrogs....of the battle of Ecthelion of the Fountain with Gothmog Lord of Balrogs in the very square of the King, where each slew the other....Along that narrow way their march was strung, when they were ambushed by Orcs... and a Balrog was with them....Many are the songs that have been sung of the duel of Glorfindel with the Balrog upon a pinnacle of rock in that high place; and both fell to ruin in the abyss (Sil.242-243)."

WAR OF WRATH (F.A. 545-587)

"The Balrogs were destroyed, save some few that fled and hid themselves in caverns inaccessible at the roots of the earth...(Sil.251)."

HOW MANY?

The recounting of the Balrogs' role in these battles raises a thorny issue: what was the size of Morgoth's Balrog-contingent and how many in fact survived the War of Wrath to trouble later ages of the world ? Early versions of the *Silmarillion* make their number 1,000 (HoMe IV.302; V.137, 310; XI.74). Against this figure is set a late (post-LotR) marginal note Tolkien appended to the Annals of Aman: "There should not be supposed more than say 3 or at most 7 ever existed (HoMe X.80)." This explicit statement of Tolkien's intention would seem to close the matter; yet, in fact, it was never fully integrated into the *Silmarillion* tradition.[6]

To begin with, if there were so few (and a definite number) of them in existence, why leave so many references to an unspecified number in place?

Recall, moreover the earlier-cited passage in which Melkor "gathered to himself spirits out of the halls of Eä that he had perverted to his service, and....seeing now his time he drew near again to Arda....And he passed therefore over the Walls of the Night with his **host,** and came to Middle-earth far in the north (S.36)." Do seven Balrogs constitute a host? ? ?

Similarly, if a "few" Balrogs survived the War of Wrath (and I take a "few" to mean more than two), then clearly the flat statement "The Balrogs were destroyed" cannot be accurate — if there were only seven to begin with, and two of those seven perished in Gondolin,[7] and "some few" escaped the fall of Angband, that means only two Balrogs *at most* were destroyed in the War of Wrath. Clearly, then, there exists an unresolvable discrepancy between the tradition as it stands and Tolkien's projected intention to modify it. To be sure, one need not choose between the extremes of a thousand and seven—the Balrogs might still be comparatively rare, and yet number substantially more numerous than a mere handful.

HOW BIG?

What kind of stature did Balrogs command? The evidence is sparse, and is frustrated moreover by the changeability of their fana; yet something may be said. The Balrog that Glorfindel fought in Gondolin was said to double the Elf's stature, so that his dirk "pierced the Balrog's belly nigh his own face...(HoMe II.194)."[8] Tolkien's description of the Balrog of Moria is less precise. The published text depicts: "a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater (LotR 1.344)." This description derives from an earlier version which ran as follows: "A figure strode to the fissure, no more than man-high (HoMe VII. 197)." The changed wording resulted from Tolkien's marginal note to "Alter description of Balrog. It seemed to be of man's shape, but its form could not be plainly discerned. It *felt* larger than it looked (HoMe VTI.199)."

The malleable quality of the Balrog's size, then, is directly related to its ability to modify its own fana, as is seen in the published version:

> The Balrog made no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped forward slowly onto the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were

© P. Wynne 89

spread from wall to wall. (LotR 1.345)

WHAT LANGUAGE?

In a 1958 letter to Forrest J. Ackerman, a film producer who had sent him a screenplay for a projected *LotR* movie, Tolkien criticizes a Mr. Zimmerman (the screenplay writer, abbreviated "Z") for his adaptation of Gandalf's encounter with the Balrog in Khazad-dûm:

> The Balrog *never speaks* or makes any vocal sound at all. Above all he does not laugh or sneer.....Z may think that he knows more about Balrogs than do I, but he cannot expect me to agree with him. (Let.274)

This is a curious remark, since in fact the Balrog *does* emit "a terrible cry" when he plummets into the abyss (LotR 1.345). Presumably, Tolkien's censure applies to the representation of the Balrog before his fall. The question this passage raises is whether Balrogs have the capacity for speech and, if so, what language (s) they use. I have not found any other references apart from the Khazad-dûm scene where a Balrog makes any noise, much less speech. However, it is safe to assume that, being Maiar, Balrogs were certainly *capable* of communication.

In an appendix to the essay "Ouendi and Eldar," the Noldorin loremaster Pengolodh makes the following statement concerning "the language of the Valar and Maiar:"

> Even if we had no knowledge of it...we could not reasonably doubt that the Valar had a *lambe* [tongue] of their own. We know that all members of their order were incarnated by their own desire, and that most of them chose to take forms like those of the Children of Eru, as they name us. In such forms they would take on all the characters of the Incarnates that were due to the cooperation of *hroä* [body] with indwelling *feä* [spirit], for otherwise the assumption of these forms would have been needless, and they arrayed themselves in this manner long before they had any cause to appear before us visibly. Since, then, the making of a *lambe* is the chief character of an Incarnate, the Valar, having arrayed them in this manner, would inevitably during their long sojourn in Arda have made a *lambe* for themselves. (HoMe XI.397)

It is not clear, however, that Pengolodh's statement would apply to the Balrogs, who did not assume "forms like those of the Children of Eru." Granted, the Balrogs are of vaguely "man-shape," but surely this is different from the "normal" forms which the Valar assumed in Aman. By this I refer to the ability of the Valar and Maiar to "clothe themselves in their own thought," a more primordially elemental manifestation than the forms which they wear in the presence of the Elves:

> ...their shape comes of their knowledge of the visible World, rather than of the World itself; and they need it not, save only as we use raiment, and yet we may be naked and suffer no loss of our being....But the shapes wherein the Great Ones array themselves are not at all times like to the shapes of the kings and queens of the Children of Ilúvatar; for at times they may clothe themselves in their own thought, made visible in forms of majesty and dread. (S.21)

This description seems to fit the alternately shadowy, alternately fiery form with which the Balrog appears in Moria. The question, then, is whether this elemental manifestation precludes the capacity for vocally-articulated speech, just as assumption of an Elven form enables it. Returning to Pengolodh, we learn that:

> Even when using bodily forms [the Valar] had less need of any *tengwesta* than had the Incarnate; and they had made a *lambe* for the pleasure of exercising the powers and skills of the bodily form, and (more remotely) for the better understanding of the minds of the Incarnate when they should appear, rather than for any need that they felt among themselves. For the Valar and Maiar could transmit and receive thought directly (by the will of both parties) according to their right nature; and though the use of bodily form (albeit assumed and not imposed) in a measure made this mode of communication less swift and precise, they retained this faculty in a degree far surpassing that seen among any of the Incarnate. (HoMe XI.406)

As Maiar, the Balrogs thus possessed the capacity to communicate telepathically among themselves and with their master. However, one would think that as "high-captain of Angband," Gothmog at least would have required spoken language in order to coordinate and command Morgoth's hosts on the battlefield. It seems logically necessary, therefore, that, under certain circumstances, Balrogs could and did use mundane speech.[9]

But what language would they have spoken? Certainly not one of the Elven tongues. Gothmog, Balrogath,[10] Valaraukar—these are simply linguistic artifacts devised by the Elves (or Men) who composed and transmitted the *Silmarillion* tradition, and do not represent the names actually used by the minions of Angband. If, however, a Noldo such as Finrod was able to "read in the minds of Men such thought as they wished to reveal in speech, so that their words were easily interpreted (S.141)," it seems not unlikely that a Maia, possessed of native telepathic powers, could all the more easily understand (and perhaps respond in kind to) the speech of any Incarnates it might encounter.

CAN THEY FLY?

Does a Balrog's *fana* grant its wearer the power of flight? This question is raised by Tolkien's description of the Balrog of Moria, which possesses wings (or, at least, the shadowy *semblance* of wings). Doubt may arise, however, when it is noted that the Balrog does not actually use these appendages as a means of locomotion:

> ...with a rush it leaped across the fissure....The dark figure streaming with fire raced towards them....For a moment...the fiery shadow halted. Then the echoes died as suddenly as a flame blown out by a dark wind, and the enemy advanced again....The Balrog reached the bridge....[it] halted again, facing [Gandalf], and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings....It stepped forward slowly onto the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall....With a bound the Balrog leaped full upon the bridge....With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. (LotR 1.344-345)

Only *after* it has reached Gandalf does the Balrog's shadow assume the form of wings. Manipulable in size, spreading "from wall to wall," these appear to function more as a manifestation and extension of the Balrog's horrificpresence, rather than a means for getting from one place to another. As a

matter of fact, however, in the Appendix on Durin's Folk in LotR III, Tolkien does write:

> Thus they roused from sleep a thing of terror that, flying from Thangorodrim, had lain hidden at the foundations of the earth since the coming of the Host of the West: a Balrog of Morgoth. (LotR III.353)

Yet nowhere, neither in The *Silmarillion* nor in *LotR,* does Tolkien actually *depict* a Balrog in flight—they leap, they run, they plummet over precipices to their deaths, but they are never seen to fly.[11] This conspicuous absence, combined with the (apparently) immaterial quality of the wings of the Balrog in Moria, has led many to question whether the reference to "flying" in the above-quoted passage was intended metaphorically rather than literally.

The metaphorical reading is certainly a reasonable possibility. On two other occasions, Tolkien recounts the same escape from Angband without any reference to flight. In *The Silmarillion* we read that the Balrogs simply "fled and hid themselves in caverns inaccessible at the roots of the earth...(S.251)." Similarly, in one of his letters Tolkien writes "But it is here found (there is usually a hang-over especially of evil from one age to another) that one had escaped and taken refuge under the mountains of Hithaeglin (the Misty Mountains) (Let. 180)." Moreover, in LotR Tolkien describes Shelob too as "flying" from Angband's ruin (LotR 11.332), and yet no one would imagine this literally. Clearly, then, it is not the "flight from Angband" passage alone, but rather reading it in the context of the Balrog's wings in Moria, which suggests the possibility of a literal interpretation.

Another passage may have some bearing on the question. In *The Silmarillion,* the Balrogs of Angband manage to "pass over Hithlum as a tempest of fire" (S.81) in no time flat to rescue Morgoth from Ungoliant (a good 300 miles according to Fonstad's estimation; Atlas.14). This text was altered from an earlier version that read: "Swiftly they arose, and they passed **with winged speed** over Hithlum, and they came to Lammoth as a tempest of fire (HoMe X.297)." Assuming the omission of the expression "with winged speed" is to be attributed to Tolkien himself and not to Christopher Tolkien's editorial hand, this may be an indication that Tolkien wished to avoid the connotation that Balrogs could fly.[12]

It should become apparent that the issue of whether or not Balrogs could fly is a complex one. I do not presume here to present an exhaustive analysis of all the arguments on both sides, only to alert the reader to the fact that the debate exists, and to illustrate some of the more common arguments.

LOYAL TO WHOM?

When the Fellowship recounts their misadventure in Moria to Celeborn and Galadriel in Lorien, Legolas identifies Gandalf's adversary as "a Balrog of Morgoth... of all elf-banes the most deadly, save the One who sits in the Dark Tower (LotR I.371)." The Balrog is not here associated with Sauron but with Morgoth. Although the Appendix on Durin's folk surmises that the Balrog "had already been awakened by the malice of Sauron" prior to its release by the Dwarves (LotR III.353), there is no indication that the Balrog was ever subservient to Sauron, in spite of the latter's greater power.[13]

The independence of the Balrogs from Sauron, both during and after Morgoth's reign, is explained by Tolkien in the following passage:

> It will be seen that the wills of Orcs and Balrogs etc. are part of Melkor's power 'dispersed'. Their spirit is one of hate. But hate is non-cooperative (except under direct fear). Hence the rebellions, mutinies, etc. when Morgoth seems far off....Also (n.b.) Morgoth not Sauron is the source of Orc-wills. Sauron is just another (if greater) agent. Orcs can rebel against him without losing their own irremediable allegiance to evil (Morgoth). (HoMe X.411)

However, it does appear as though some kind of alliance or tacit agreement of non-interference existed between Sauron and the Balrog of Moria, as it is Sauron who "begins to people Moria with his creatures" some five centuries after the Balrog expelled the Dwarves (LotR III.368). Since the Orcs and Trolls of Moria seem to operate in concert with (if not in subordination to) the Balrog at the time of the War of the Ring, some degree of concord between the two Maiar must have existed. On the other hand, the contrariness of the Orcs of Moria when acting in concert with those of Mordor underlines that the Balrog was no mere slave to the Dark Tower (LotR 11.50 *et al).*

Nonetheless, the Balrog was not entirely free to do as he would. He was still subject to Morgoth's dormant will:

> One of the reasons for [Morgoth's] self-weakening is that he has given to his 'creatures', Orcs, Balrogs, etc. *power of recuperation and multiplication.* So that they will gather again without further specific orders. Part of his native creative power has gone out into making an independent evil growth out of his control. (HoMe X.391)

BALROGS IN MERP

Having reviewed and discussed what is known about Balrogs from the canon, let us see how these creatures have been interpreted in the MERP series. Balrogs are discussed primarily in *Middle-earth Rote Playing* (p. 180), *Valar and Maiar* (pp. 106-116) and *Creatures of Middle-earth* (pp. 84-86). Additional information on individual Balrogs appears in *Moria* (pp. 111-113) and *The Northern Waste* (pp. 61-62).

With the exception of The Northern Waste, all of these books maintain that Balrogs can fly "albeit clumsily (Valar. 106)."14 They also appear to adopt the view that the Balrogs were corrupted to Melkor's service only after the creation of Arda, rather than during the Ainulindalë. This is suggested by the fact that the Balrogs are said to have "once served the Valie Vana (Valar. 106)."

The rationale for this connection is unclear, since Vana's association was not with fire but with youthfulness: "All flowers spring as she passes and open if she glances upon them; and all birds sing at her coming (S.29)." Perhaps what was intended was to link the Balrogs to Arien, the Maia who later guided the Sun, since earlier she "had tended the golden flowers in the gardens of Vana (S. 99)."[15] In other words, ICE wants to depict the Balrogs as having been corrupted from an originally "good" fire spirit. Yet this creates chronological difficulties, since Arien's association with fire did not begin until the creation of the Sun (long ages after the Balrogs had joined Melkor's allegiance in Utumno).[16]

While well-intentioned, this attempt to situate the Balrogs within a larger Maiarin context seems to me to miss the point. As I have argued, the distinctive features of the Balrogs—darkness, fire, terror — appear to derive from Melkor himself, not from any lesser "fire spirit." Their corruption preceded the creation of the World, and had its

source in the discord of the Ainulindalë.

One final detail of the MERP treatment of Balrogs needs to be reconsidered: the statement that the Balrog of Moria knew the Black Speech of Mordor (Valar.108). This attribution ignores two facts: 1) that the Black Speech was spoken only during the Second Age (throughout which the Balrog "slept" in the bowels of the earth); 2) it was only spoken by Sauron's servants (which the Balrog certainly was not). Moreover, no one during the Third Age used (or remembered) the Black Speech except perhaps the court of Barad-dûr. In other words, there is no plausible context in which the Balrog would speak or have knowledge of this dead language — not that he couldn't comprehend it or any other language if he heard it, given his telepathic ability as a Maia.

All told, the MERP series details five Balrogs. These are:

- **Felagrog:** The Balrog of Moria.[17]
- **Gothmog:** Lord of Balrogs, who perishes in Gondolin's fall.
- **Lungorthin:** A Balrog-lord of Angband who appears in "The Lay of the Children of Húrin" (HoMe 111.98, 102). His invented bio does not specify whether he survived Angband's fall (Valar.111).
- **Múar:** This invented Balrog (not derived from Tolkien's writings) was stationed by Morgoth in the eastern reaches of the Iron Mountains. Having survived the fall of Angband, Múar awoke from dormancy around S.A. 1100 and proceeded to forge a vast (though short-lived) territorial empire in the East of Middle-earth. Eclipsed by Sauron's own nascent continental dominion during the Dark Years, Múar is slain by vengeful Dwarves in S.A. 2741.
- **Durlach:** Another invented Balrog, Durlach was trapped within the collapsing ruin of Angband, but was roused in S.A. 512 by a Noldorin explorer of the Northern Waste. The Balrog, however, remained imprisoned in "Morgoth's Well" (a volcanic lake encompassing Angband's remnants), a peril to any who ventured into his lair.

One of the main considerations in using one of these Balrogs in a role playing , game, then, is temporal setting. Apart from Lungorthin's unknown fate, only Durlach is available for use in T.A. 16-40. (Of course, a GM may simply invent other, hitherto unknown, survivors.) Bear in mind, though, that the very continued existence of Balrogs in Middle-earth after Angband's fall -was unknown even to Gandalf at the end of the Third Age, so the introduction of a Balrog (whether one of the above or something new) should be handled with some sensitivity to their need for obscurity. Naturally, it is possible that denizens of Middle-earth who are unaware of the history of Beleriand in the Elder Days might encounter a Balrog and yet not recognize its true nature.

Another consideration is motive. Múar aside, Balrogs replicate Morgoth's nature, not Sauron's. In *Morgoth's Ring,* Tolkien drew a strong distinction between two orientations: Sauron's lawful evil (i.e., driven by the desire for ordered domination of the world and its inhabitants) and Morgoth's chaotic evil, which ultimately desires annihilation, not dominion (HoMe X. 394-398). Consequently, Balrogs are appropriate candidates for thematizing an incredibly powerful antagonist driven by an instinct for destructiveness (but one distinct from that of dragons, for whom anarchic violence is but a means to an end—the accumulation of wealth).

A final consideration to factor in when contemplating a Balrog in your game is the magnitude of its power. Unless your PCs are Eldarin lords or beings of comparable power, it is unlikely they would be able to survive proximity with a Balrog unless there were some extenuating circumstances involved. Morgoth's Well provides a good example of this. The enchanted wards emplaced around its circumference serve to mute Durlach's power, so that (provided they do not walk foolishly into the heart of his lair) PCs can have a fighting chance to perceive the Balrog's will and evade its influence while still being subject to its threat.

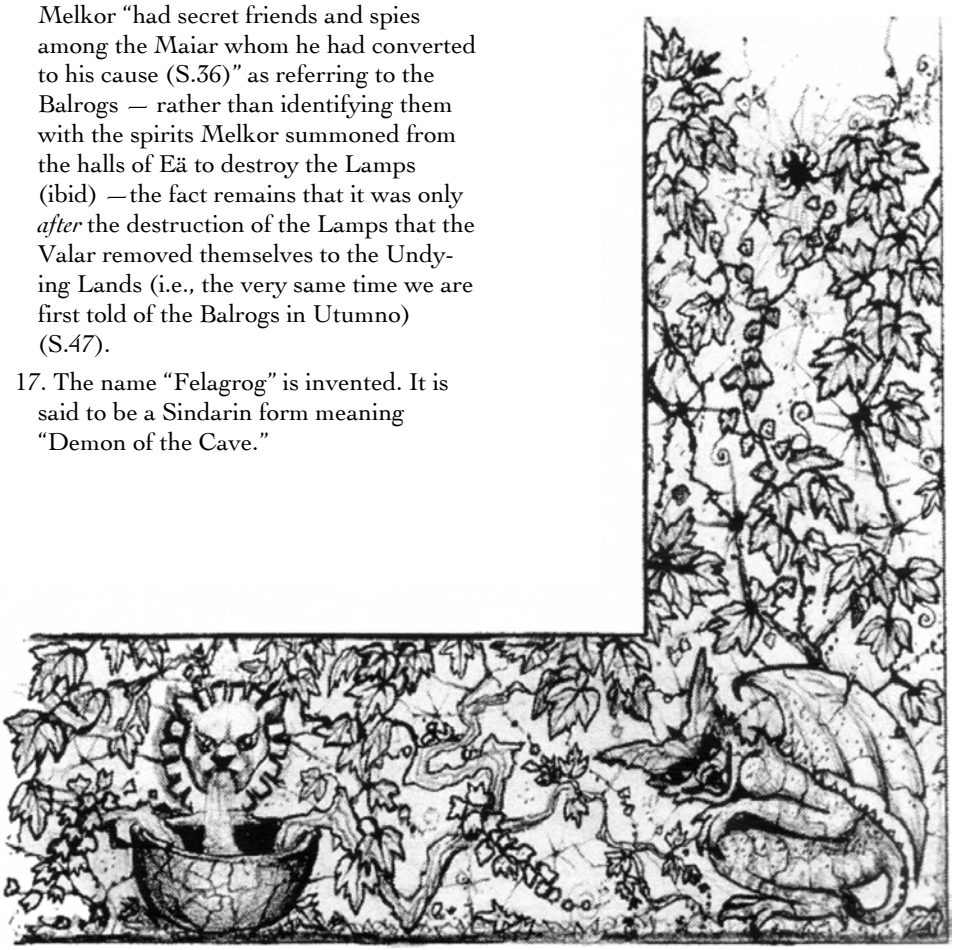
Balrogs do not present insurmountable obstacles to realistic, challenging role playing situations involving PCs of less than superhero status; rather, it is the very dangers that Balrog-level antagonists pose which drive a GM to greater creativity and cunning plot twists.

ENDNOTES

1. The actual conception of the "Malkarauki," in fact, has even earlier linguistic origins (QL: forthcoming).
2. The same origin is implied by the designation of the Balrogs as *Umaiar,* which appears in the Annals of Aman §30 (HoMe X.79).
3. This passage refers (apparently) back to the Discord of Melkor as that unfolded in the vision: "And Ilúvatar spoke to Ulmo, and said: 'Seest thou not how here in this little realm in the Deeps of Time Melkor hath made war upon thy province?.... Melkor hath devised heats and fires without restraint..." (Sil. 19)
4. See Sil.22. While the opposite view (that the Balrogs did participate in the First War) might be argued on the basis of Sil.31 ("...so great was the power of his uprising that in ages forgotten he contended with Manwë and all the Valar, and through long years in Arda held dominion over most of the lands of the Earth. But he was not alone. For of the Maiar many were drawn to his splendour in the days of his greatness, and remained in that allegiance down into his darkness..."), it should not be forgotten that the expression "through long years" implies the count of Time (cf. Sil, pp. 38-39), and might refer only to the ages following the destruction of the Great Lamps, when Melkor *did* in fact control "most of the lands of the Earth" in the Valar's despite (Sil.47). In other words, while the Balrogs may well have acquired their destructive disposition and character by their emulation of Melkor in the Ainulindalë, they may not have actually entered Arda until "he gathered to himself spirits out of the halls of Eä that he had perverted to his service, and he deemed himself strong. And seeing now his time he drew near again to Arda.... And he passed therefore over the Walls of the Night with his host, and came to Middle-earth far in the north (Sil.36)." Both positions are defensible. The former (that the Balrogs participated in the First War) seems logical, given their fiery nature, but the latter (that they entered Arda only after that war) has more explicit textual support.
5. These glosses are given on Sil.31, 318.
6. Whether this was because Tolkien had second thoughts about the change or simply did not have enough time to alter it satisfactorily before his death is another issue which cannot be discussed within the scope of this essay.
7. In the Book of Lost Tales version of the Fall of Gondolin, "ere that day never had any of the Balrogs been slain by the hand of Elves or Men (HoMe 11.179)." While perhaps not much authority should be given to such an early reference that was not carried into the subsequent versions of the tale, the statement nevertheless does not conflict with the published *Silmarillion* tradition. Michael Martinez has

suggested that Balrogs underwent extensive revision in Tolkien's conception during the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. The original description of the Moria Balrog, given in "The Mines of Moria (2): The Bridge," underwent considerable change. Balrogs themselves evolved from creatures manufactured by Melkor in the 1930s to fallen Maiar in 1952 (two years prior to publication of *The Lord of the Rings)*. It therefore may not be justifiable to draw direct connections between the Balrogs of early stories with those of later stories.

8. Michael Martinez expresses some reservation as to the value of descriptive details taken from Lost Tales. On the other hand, there is nothing about this Balrog description which contradicts what is said in *LotR;* in both stories, the Balrogs are greater than man-size. I am unaware of any precise height calculations Tolkien may have given for the Noldor apart from that of Galadriel, "the tallest of all the women of the Eldar of whom tales tell," whom he estimates to have stood *6'4"* (UT.286). If we assume that Glorfindel stood rather higher—perhaps *7'*—that would render his Balrog adversary around 14' (comparable in stature to an Ent or Troll).
9. One such circumstance might have been the Balrog's casting of the counter-spell to Gandalf's shutting-spell in the chamber of Mazarbul. I am indebted to Michael Martinez for pointing this out to me.
10. This Sindarin collective plural form appears in HoMe X.79, alongside the Ouenya form *"Úmaiar."*
11. The tradition that Balrogs move about by leaping or springing is attested already in Lost Tales *(HoMe 77*.178, 194), and is repeated in Gandalf's recounting of his pursuit of the Balrog after their fall from the bridge: "Out he sprang, and even as I came behind, he burst into new flame....I threw down my enemy, and he fell from the high place and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin (*LotR II*.105-106)." Recall also Tolkien's description of the Dagor Bragollach, where the rivers of fire *ran* faster than Balrogs (S.151).
12. In a personal communication, Michael Martinez wrote: 'One of the reasons why I believe Christopher Tolkien is responsible for dropping the "winged speed" reference is that he says he took most of the text for *The Silmarillion* from "The Grey Annals." The "winged speed" reference occurs in the last version of *"Ouenta Silmarillion."* Since GA doesn't cover the early material in depth, Christopher had to merge the two texts together. He makes no mention of the change in wording with respect to the flying Balrogs, which leads me to believe he was not aware of it. Or else he felt the "winged speed" was unnecessary. Perhaps this is one of Guy Kay's contributions. I can only speculate about what happened there.' Naturally, if Michael's supposition is correct, the passage in question would weigh rather heavily as evidence in favor of Balrog flight.
13. The superiority of Sauron's might vis-à-vis the Balrogs is implied in *HoMe* X.410.
14. The rulebook elaborates thus: "Balrogs "fly" over obstacles and don't have to touch the ground except in a restricted space (MERP.180)."
15. One of the Balrogs is described as having been "a servant of Vána and companion to Arien (Valar.113)," and another as "a powerful cohort of Arien (Valar.lll)."
16. It is perhaps this chronological problem which led to the error in the rulebook that the Balrogs originally "came from the Undying Lands, just as the Istari and Sauron had...(MERP.180)." Yet even if one interprets the Almaren tradition that Melkor "had secret friends and spies among the Maiar whom he had converted to his cause (S.36)" as referring to the Balrogs — rather than identifying them with the spirits Melkor summoned from the halls of Eä to destroy the Lamps (ibid) —the fact remains that it was only *after* the destruction of the Lamps that the Valar removed themselves to the Undying Lands (i.e., the very same time we are first told of the Balrogs in Utumno) (S.47).
17. The name "Felagrog" is invented. It is said to be a Sindarin form meaning "Demon of the Cave."



Dwarven Magic

Carl L. Brodt: PO Box 7104, San Francisco, CA 94120-7104
(carlbrodt@aol.com)

Although a Free People, the Dwarves of Middle-earth have a distinctly dark and unpleasant side to their nature. Small and stunted in body as well as spirit, they are "stone-hard," grim and quick to resentment, dangerous if displeased, materialistic and possessive, unforgiving and unforgetttng, secretive and calculating, and usually insensitive and uncaring for any but their own (Sil 42, 103, 132; HoMe XII: 327; cf HoMe IV: 174; HoMe 1:236; Letters: 207; Hob: 204). Because the magic of a race ultimately reflects its nature, this unique side of Dwarven nature provides the basis for the unique characteristics of Dwarven spells and spell-casters of Middle-earth.

THE DWARVEN CURSE

The most noteworthy Dwarven spell is that of a curse uttered when a Dwarf suffers the loss of that which he holds dearest at the hands of an unrepentant foe. Unlike an Evil Cleric in RM (who channels an evil deity's power to lay curses), Dwarves have a rarely used but innate ability to twist the Song of Fate to their ends one time in their lives — an ability which stems from the Dwarven willingness to observe no natural limits in their efforts at settling a score. As Tolkien puts it, "there is no knowing what a dwarf will not dare and do for revenge or the recovery of his own (Hob: 193)."

The Dwarven power to curse also differs from that of the Evil Cleric in a number of ways:

(1) by having the flexibility to focus itself upon an item, such as a ring or a horde (rather than just toward people),

(2) by being a spontaneous (rather than learned) utterance,

(3) by having to be fulfilled in a strictly natural (versus para-natural) way, and

(4) most importantly, by being strictly conditional in nature.

Anyone touched by a Dwarven curse gets no resistance roll, but can only avoid the results of the curse by their actions. For example, the curse "May those who have stolen my gold return it or suffer as I have suffered at its loss" clearly leaves the possessors of the gold with a way to avoid future grief. If this condition is not met by the possessors, as Andróg said, "The curse of a Dwarf never dies...(UT: 106)." The spontaneous nature of a Dwarven curse means that it is, of necessity, brief; and cannot involve multiple conditions or be a compound sentence. The "natural" fulfillment of the curse also precludes time references in the curse.

DWARVEN PROFESSIONS

Beyond this seldom-used ability to lay a curse, few Dwarves show spell-casting abilities. Dwarves' preoccupation with crafts and technology has diverted them from developing those more natural abilities to manipulate the Secret Fire (Essence) in all Creation, and their past conflicts with Sauron and Elves have led them to view with suspicion anyone who does develop them. In cases where such magical abilities exist, they derive their power from the Channeling realm and take the form of three Dwarven spell-casting professions — each with a spell list from a type of evil magic-user. These three professions are that of the Tenders, the Delvers and the Alchemists.

Tenders are animist-like spell-casters who have devoted themselves to the nurturing of Dwarven life beneath the ground through the use of detection, protection and healing spells. This commitment has caused few Tenders to travel outside of their underground community, and when they do, they are usually part of a larger Dwarven group such as any army.

In battle, Tenders function as medics and work to retrieve the bodies of the dead (especially royal dead) for burial. When this is impossible and when the Tender has sufficient power, he will try to petrify the corpse to prevent its desecration. Petrifications of this sort are what gave rise to the old Elven belief "that dying the Dwarves returned to the earth and the stone of which they were made; yet that is not their own belief (Sil: 42)."

Delvers are rangers who function primarily as underground explorers. They also often serve as auxiliaries to mining opera-

Tender

tions and underground combat expeditions to help protect other Dwarves from subterranean hazards such as lack of oxygen, harmful gasses and flooding. Delvers have superior caving skills, even by Dwarven standards, and receive a special +25 bonus to the secondary skill of caving.

Alchemists are the closest thing in Dwarven society to a Mage, and differ from RM alchemists in numerous ways. Because of the abundance of Dwarven talent in the area of making things, Dwarven alchemists are able to focus more completely on the analysis and practice of converting matter and embedding magic in crafted items than their RM counterparts. This magic does not include the impressing of empathy or intelligence into items; for Dwarves see such magic as unnatural and inconsistent with the lessons learned by Aulë at their creation. The magic does, however, include certain rune-related abilities.

One of these abilities is setting up spell trip-wires. The door which appeared in the rocky wall of Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit* is an example of such a work by a Dwarven alchemist (Hob: 201). Another is the power to inscribe and embed their runes in runestones made from organic rock like coral limestone, coal and chalk. These runestones must be cast upon the group to activate the spells, and have a relatively high chance of defacing, chipping and breaking when cast. The exact chance depends upon the rock in the runestone and the surface upon which it is thrown.

Finally, some Dwarven alchemists choose to develop the secondary skill of writing moon-letters. Elrond describes these moon-letters as "rune letters, but you cannot seem them, not when you look straight at them. They can only be seen when the moon shines behind them, and what is more, with the more cunning sort it must be a moon of the same shape and season as the day they were written. The Dwarves invented them and wrote them with silver pens...(Hob: 62)."

SPELL LIST COMPARISONS

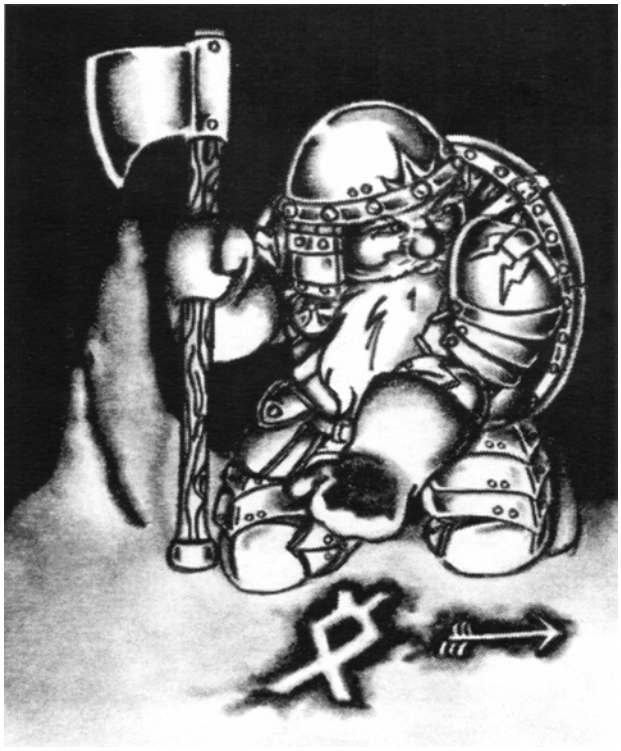
Below is a comparison of the spells of the Dwarven spell-casters and their MERP counterparts, and the description of three unique Dwarven spell lists.

Normal Open Channeling Spells	Dwarven Open Channeling Spells
Detection Mastery	Detection Mastery
Surface Ways	Surface Ways
Sound/Light Ways	Sound/Light Ways
Calm Spirits	Calm Spirits
Nature's Movement	Physical Enhancements (OE: MERP/RM)
Protections	Damage Resistance (OM: RM)
Spell Defense	Spell Defense
Nature's Lore	Delving (OM: RM)

Animist Lists	Tender Lists
Blood Ways	Blood Ways
Organ Ways	Organ Ways
Purifications	Purifications
Bone/Muscle Ways	Bone/Muscle Ways
Plant Mastery	Living Earth (new: see below)
Direct Channeling	Direct Channeling
Animal Mastery	Flesh Destruction (Sorcerer: RM)
Creations	Creations

Ranger Lists	Delver Lists
Path Mastery	Divination (new: see below)
Nature's Ways	Fluid Destruction (Sorcerer: RM)
Moving Ways	Air Purification (new: see below)
Nature's Guises	Nature's Guises

Mage Lists	Alchemist Lists
Fire Law	Warding Ways (Runemaster: RMII)
Ice Law	Essence Imbedding (Alchemist: RM)
Light Law	Mentalism/Channeling Imbedding (Alchemist: RM)
Water Law	Sigil/Runes Imbedding (Runemaster: RMII)
Wind Law	Symbol Ways (CC: RM)
Earth Law	Item Lore (Bard: MERP/RM)
Living Change	Living Change
Lofty Bridge	Matter Destruction (Evil Magician: RM)



ALCHEMIST

NEW SPELL LISTS

LIVING EARTH

1. **Earth Lore (P) Duration: — Range: S** Caster knows the name and nature of the minerals and other items composing a piece or earth.
2. **Harden Earth (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Hardens 100 cu' of soft ground to packed earth.
3. **Stone Speech (I) Duration: 1 min/ lvl Range: S** Caster can communicate with any one stone if it possess any animate qualities (e.g., a holy stone which possesses some sort of intelligence, etc).
4. **Earthwall (E) Duration: 1 min/lvl Range 100'** Summons a wall of packed earth up to 10' x 10' x 3' at base, 1' at top; must rest on solid surface.
5. **Heal Earth/Stone (F) Duration: — Range: 100'** Any previous cracks or flows in material up to 10' x 10' x 10' section seal completely.
6. **Mineral Location (P) Duration: 1 min/ lvl © Range: 50'** Detects any mineral; caster can concentrate on a 5' area each rnd, even if s/he cannot see it.
7. **Stonewall** (E) As *Earthwall,* except wall is up to 10' x 10' x 1' of stone.
8. **Merge Organic (F) Duration: 1 min/lvl Range: S** Allows caster to merge up to 1' deep into organic material, even "organic" stone, like coral limestone, coal or chalk. At least part of the caster's body must be within 1' of the surface of the material. The spell requires the caster to be inactive but still aware of surrounding activity. The caster cannot move while merged, but may exit at any time.
9. **Earth/Stone (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Changes 100 cu' of packed earth to stone; change is gradual and takes 3 rounds.
10. **Earthwall True** (E) As *Earthwall,* except duration is permanent.

DIVINATION

1. **Detect Harmful Gas (P) Duration: 1 min/lvl © Range: 50'** Detects any harmful gas; caster can concentrate on any 5' radius each rnd, even if s/he cannot see it.
2. **Detect Water (P) Duration: 1 min/ lvl © Range: 50'** Detects water; caster can concentrate on any 5' radius each rnd, even if s/he cannot see it.
3. **Detect Flaws/Cracks (P) Duration: 1 min/lvl © Range: 50'** Detects cracks or flaws in stones or an earthen structure; caster can concentrate on a single small stone or up to any 5' radius each rnd.
4. **Stone Analysis (I) Duration: — Range: 10'** Caster learns the nature and history of any one stone.
5. **Metal Analysis (I) Duration: — Range: 10'** Gives nature and origin of metal, and when and how metal was obtained and worked.
6. **Gas Analysis (I) Duration: — Range: 10'** Gives nature and origin of gas in air.
7. **Earth Sense (I) Duration: — Range: 50'** Caster acquires visual image of any entity transversing area or any unusual occurrence in area within a period equal to 1 hr/lvl.
8. **Liquid Analysis (I) Duration: — Range: 10'** Gives nature and origin of liquid.
9. **Detect Minerals (P) Duration: 1 min/ lvl © Range: 50'** Detects any mineral; caster can concentrate on a 5' area each rnd, even if s/he cannot see it.
10. **Commune With Earth (I) Duration: C Range: S** Caster receives from the earth a "yes" or "no" to a question of a single topic; usable lx/day.

AIR PURIFICATIONS

1. **Breezes (F) Duration: C Range: 10'/lvl R** Causes a light cooling breeze as long as the caster concentrates.
2. **Disburse Dust (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Disperses all dust in a 10' radius/lvl.
3. **Airwall (F) Duration: 6 rounds Range: 100'** Creates a 10' x 10' x 3' wall of dense churning air, cuts all movement and attacks through it by 50%.
4. **Airstop I (F) Duration: C Range: 100'** Cuts all generalized air movement (i.e., wind) by 30 MPH in a 10' radius (will not affect breathing).
5. **Gas to Air (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Changes any gas to oxygen at a rate of 1 cu'/rnd as long as the caster concentrates.
6. **Airstop II (F) Duration: C Range: 100'** As Airstop I, but in a 20' radius.
7. **Oxygenation I (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Adds oxygen to air in a 10' radius at a rate of 1% of original air/rnd.
8. **Settle Dust (F) Duration: P Range: 100'** Settles all dust in a 10' radius/lvl.
9. **Airstop III (F) Duration: C Range: 100'** As Airstop I, but in a 100' radius.
10. **Oxygenation II (F) Duration: C Range: 100'** As Oxygenation I, but in a 20' radius at a rate of 1% of original air/rnd.

DELVER

An Interview with Chris Tubb

Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948, USA (chrisl224@aol.com)

While it could be said that fantasy role playing is first and foremostly a matter of words —of creating an imaginary universe by people talking to one another— let us not forget that FRP was born the step-child of miniature-based wargaming, a medium in which visible, material representations of characters are an essential element. The use of lead figures as "props" for FRP continues to this very day, and MERP is no exception. Beginning in 1987, the Irish-based Prince August Ltd. launched "Mithril," a range of miniatures based on Tolkien's works, and designed especially with a view to ICE's MERP series. Chris Tubb, one of the prime movers of this endeavor, has graciously granted us a few moments of his time.

Chris S: **What is your involvement in the Mithril range? When did you first become interested in Middle-earth related miniatures? What sort of background did you have in miniatures when you began work on the series?**

Chris T: I have designed all the Mithril range, written most of the promotional material, designed the packaging and sculpted all the miniatures except the tables and chairs for the Prancing Pony. So that's pretty much everything really, except spinning the figures. I have been designing miniatures since the late '70s, producing mostly historical figures. I had done a lot of work for Prince August Ltd., the parent company of Mithril, including, in the early to mid '80s, a fantasy range of character figures and generic types called Fantasy Armies which were for use with AD&D. In the latter part of the '80s I did a couple of licensed ranges for some French fantasy games, both of which have long since disappeared without a trace. The first was a post-apocalypse survivors game called *Bitume,* the second, *Légendes Celtiques,* a fantasy game based on mythological characters and events. For what it's worth, the one game I would have loved to produce a figure range for at that time was GDW's *Traveller 2300.*

Chris S: **I understand that Mithril has just reached its 10th anniversary. How did the range get started?**

Chris T: Mithril started in a sense quite by accident, from an erroneous remark overheard at GenCon in the summer of '87. Lars Edman (the owner of Prince August) and myself heard a whisper at the end of the show that ICE was planning to produce a game based on the Mad Max films. We thought this might be a good opportunity to obtain a high profile figure license. Because it was the end of GenCon we decided to drive down to Charlottesville, where ICE were based, to discuss this with them. However, when we got there, we discovered that they had had problems with the license and that the whole project had been abandoned some weeks before. But having gone all that way, we spent a couple of days with the folks there and discussed (inevitably) amongst other things their Middle-earth projects, which were at the time going very well for them. I discovered a remarkable similarity between my own views of Middle-earth and those of Pete Fenlon (then the CEO), and was delighted when he asked us if we might be interested in making a range of Middle-earth miniatures for use with the game modules. Apparently, Grenadier Models, the most recent possessor of the license, had decidec not to expand its range any further. This prospect seemed to have a great deal of potential, and we secured the Middle-eartl license shortly thereafter. So really by accident and an incorrect rumor Mithril was born.

Chris S: **In the descriptions of the range that I have read, I notice that you say Mithril is based upon LotR and *The Hobbit.* I take it this reflects the boundaries of Tolkien Enterprises' license to JRRT's legacy. I also noticed that at least two series of the range relate to the Túrin cycle from *The Silmarillion.* How did you manage that? Do you plan on covering any other First Age themes in the future? (Túrin's one of my personal favorites.)**

Chris T: The question of what falls precisely within the ambit of the Tolkien license is somewhat ill-defined in some areas. Although, strictly speaking, the license covers *The Hobbit* and LotR, it can be argued that the latter work contains some of *The Silmarillion*'s contents, both in textual references and in the various appendices. Also, one can argue that the use of some of the background material is essential to the interpretation of many aspects of LotR. This is the quite legitimate justification for ICE's use of First Age material in items like the *Lords of Middle-earth* series. Hence, the two Mithril series based on the Turin story. I have made some lists of other First Age ranges which may be produced, but there are no definite plans in this regard as yet.

Chris S: **Excepting the Mithril Classics series, individual releases in the Mithril range have a limited circulation before they go OP. Just curious: about how many units get produced for each release? On the average, how long do they remain in stock?**

Chris T: It's difficult to be precise about this. The original idea was that the price list should always contain the same number of items so that when a new series was added to the end of the list, the one at the top would be removed. So in the old days, when Mithril appeared every two months, the lifetime of each release was theoretically one year and eight months, given a list length of a hundred. I say theoretically, because other factors always came in and disturbed things. For instance, an individual figure with an unacceptably high reject rate, and one for which the spin-mold would have to be constantly replaced (like M16) would be withdrawn early. Also, it was always too tempting for Mithril to retain a series which contained good-selling figures longer than it should, and instead cut another series out of sequence. This, I think, was a mistake in the long term, as a definite and certain lifetime for each miniature would have en-

sured the sell-through of the figures a lot faster. As for the number of produced units, this also depends on various factors. When the series appeared six times a year, with regular advertisement backup etc., Mithril was producing between 1,000 and 1,500 units of each figure as an initial release. Now, of course, with only one Mithril release last year, the numbers have declined quite considerably. Bear in mind also that the above numbers are an average. A Gandalf figure would, of course, always quadruple the sales of a Dunlending chieftain.

Chris S: About how many new releases come out each year?

Chris T: A decreasing number in the last couple of years and, as I said above, only one in the last twelve months. Prince August, the parent company of Mithril, has had other agendas recently and Mithril has not received much priority.

Chris S: **In your perception, has the audience for Mithril increased or decreased over the years? What do you think are some of the causes for this change (or continuity) in the range's popularity? I noticed that some of your series in the past have been explicitly related to ICE's MERP line (e. g., *Thieves of Tharbad, Far Harad, The Ghost Warriors),* etc.). What factors brought about this coordination? Why has it not continued in more recent years?**

Chris T: The Mithril audience has decreased over the years. This is due to various factors, not least of which is the relative decline of the role playing games and the recent ascendancy of gaming cards. It became clear to us early on in the lifetime of Mithril that there were two distinct audiences for the range, the gamer and the Tolkien collector. The former, whom we had initially considered as our prime customer, hence the initial tie-ins with the MERP modules, did not prove to be anything as large in number as the latter, the collectors. Our core collectors, whose number has remained remarkably stable during all of Mithril's fluctuations in the last years, have always been and still remain our most important customers. This is the reason why our emphasis gradually moved from the game-related releases to one more concentrated directly on LotR and its characters, and then onto vignettes and other collectable items.

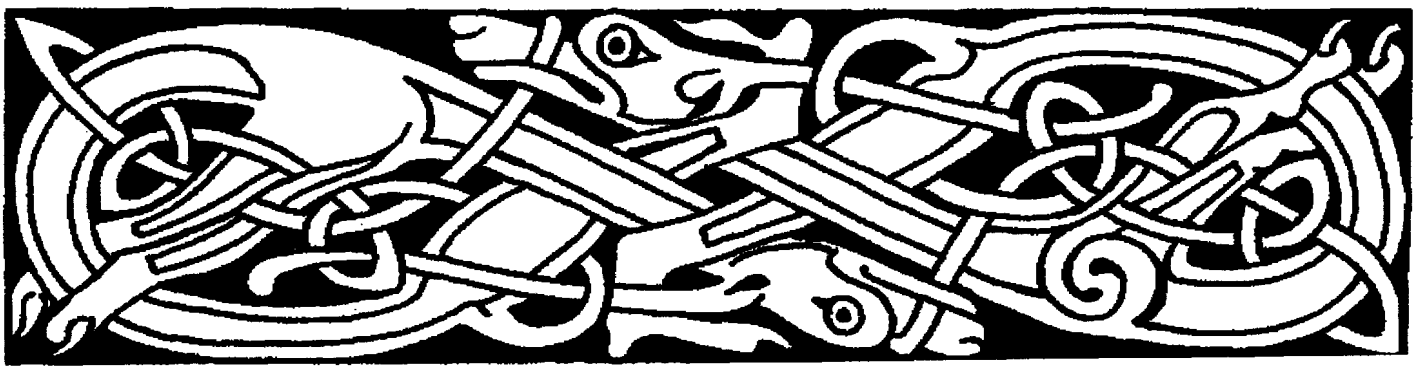
Chris S: **Mithril is not the first miniature range to devoted itself (exclusively or in part) to Tolkien's mythology. What, to your mind, has Mithril contributed to this legacy? What most distinguishes it (artistically, thematically, etc.) from other major ranges on the market today?**

Chris T: Several companies have produced lines based on LotR (both with and without a license) since the release of the animated film back in the mid '70s. One of the reasons that I was keen to obtain this license, even though such high-profile companies as Games Workshop and Grenadier Models had already produced licensed ranges from this material, was that none, I felt, had really done justice to the enormous scope of Tolkien's epic. A work as complex and layered in both its own internal histories, and its huge diversity of cultures and races, deserved a huge figure range to do it any justice. In my opinion, one of the keys to Tolkien's success in weaving such an atmosphere of believable magic and enchantment, is the internal realism of LotR and the very understated nature of all the fantasy. It is precisely because Elves and wizards are so uncommon, and because they appear against a quasi-realistic background of descriptive countryside and the feudings of Dark Age societies, that this underplayed enchantment becomes so believable and seductive. I hope that in some measure I have been able to reflect this balance in the Mithril range itself. I have constantly resisted not inconsiderable pressures to make the line more fantastic, with more grotesque monsters and exaggerated heroes. The range has always been human-oriented, with the non-human races representing a fairly small proportion of the range. Again, this has been a conscious policy designed to reflect the points made above.

Chris S: **Has your vision for the range evolved over time? What are the prospects for the future?**

Chris T: My vision of what Middle-earth should look like has remained more or less the same since Mithril's inception. As explained above, the items in the range have made a move from gaming to collector's items in the last few years, and this trend will continue. As for future prospects—well, I think I can end on a positive note in this regard, in that Mithril has commissioned me to create an entirely new line of detailed 54mm scale characters from *TheHobbit* and *LotR,* the first six ot which are standing on my desk as I write this. I hope their release at the end of this year will give Mithril a new spin and form the basis of a completely new collectable range of Middle-earth characters. As for the 32mm figures, I feel there is still much scope for new products and hope to finalize some new releases within the next few months.

Chris S: **Thank you very much for your time.**



The TA 1640 Campaign Facts and Problems

Jason Vester: 4250 S. Arville #280,
Las Vegas, NV 89103-3726, USA
(vester@nevada.edu)

Traditionally, MERP has always been set in the year 1640 of the Third Age. Avoiding the difficulties of playing during the War of the Ring, and forbidden by contract from dealing with Second or First Age topics, the original MERP authors unfortunately chose a time period no less problematic. The 17th century has no conflict, wars or quests, and indeed is most notable for one event: the Great Plague, a decidedly unheroic challenge. It has been said that "nothing is going on in 1640, except for people dying."

This article is, therefore, an attempt to solve the biggest problem of the Third Age: a lack of conflict. Some MERP products, notably the Arnor books, are amply stocked with adventure potential and need no further aid. For that reason, this article will primarily focus on Gondor and its immediate neighbors.

I must acknowledge that, in my effort to drum up battle and civil strife during this period, I am taking Middle-earth in directions its original chronicler never intended. However, it is my goal to avoid any blatant contradiction with the canon, and instead work story potential into the grey areas of Appendix A. I have felt free to ignore or retain anything published by ICE on this time period, as it suited my purpose.

BARBARA TUCHMAN'S *DISTANT MIRROR*

The starting point for any analysis of the TA 1640 campaign must begin with the Plague, and it is here that the seeds of our search for conflict may be found. Our own world also suffered a terrible plague in which, as the Medieval chronicler Jean Froissart tells us, "one third of the world died." In the wake of the Black Plague, Europe was reduced to a pathetic mess, a place trod over by, as Barbara Tuchman relates in her well-known history *A Distant Mirror*, "the four horsemen of St. John's vision, which had now become seven—plague, war, taxes, brigandage, bad government, insurrection and schism in the church." These seven horsemen become the heralds of our new 1640 campaign.

The same effects of adversity on the fabric of society have been noticed by others. James Westfall Thompson compared the aftermath of the Black Death and World War I, and found "economic chaos, social unrest, high prices, profiteering, depraved morals, lack of production, industrial indolence, frenetic gaiety, wild expenditure, luxury, debauchery, social and religious hysteria, greed, avarice, maladministration, decay of manners." Knowing as we do of Tolkien's struggles with the Great War and his altered perceptions of England after his return from it, such themes may strike MERP players as particularly poignant.

There are other reasons to look to European history as a model for Middle-earth. In the 19th century of the Third Age, Arnor made a claim to the crown of Gondor based on a line of inheritance through the female; a situation very similar to the Sallic Law controversy that became the pretext for Norman England's invasion of France (and which Shakespeare dramatized in *Henry V)*. Indeed, the cultural similarities between Arnor and Gondor, coupled with the parallel geography (substitute the English Channel for the wilderness of the Enedhwaith and the relation becomes clearer) makes an Arnor = England, Gondor = France relationship very workable. The model must not be pushed too far, but it serves as a splendid jumping-off point. Along these same lines, Umbar, the Holy Grail of Gondor's foreign policy, is analogous to the Crusader States. Although raids or invasions sometimes conquered it and transformed the haven into a colony in a distant, hostile land, the new state never lasted long and Gondor was inevitably left gazing at Umbar with longing eyes from across the sea. The free city of Tharbad can even serve the role of Italian city state, promoting conflict and reaping the profits.

With these analogies as a base, and working with Tolkien's own "lost manuscript" format, it is therefore possible to create a much more lively 17th Century.

NOTES ON THE RED BOOK

It is the *Red Book of Westmarch* that tells us all we know for certain about events in the Third Age. Although a manuscript in remarkably good condition, it was impossible for such a work to survive for so long without sustaining some damage. Perhaps the most glaring loss to the book -was a single folio consisting of four pages of what is now known as "Appendix A." These four pages detail the events of the post-Plague years and the reign of King Tarondor in some detail, and would have been forever lost to us had not a version of the pages, no doubt further corrupted by copyists, surfaced only recently.

The break occurs in Appendix A, section iv, "Gondor and the Heirs of Anarion." After describing the Great Plague as the "second and greatest evil" to strike the South-kingdom, it is related that the king and all his children died, the watch on Mordor failed, Sauron began to arise in the Greenwood, and the White Tree of Minas Anor perished. Tarondor, nephew to the king, took the throne, removed the royal household to Minas Anor due to the general abandonment of Osgiliath in the wake of the Plague, and replanted a seedling of the Tree. The manuscript continues thus: "Few of those who had fled from the Plague into Ithilien or to the western dales were willing to return. Tarondor, coming young to the throne, had the longest reign of all the Kings of Gondor, but he could achieve little more than the reordering of his realm within, and the slow nursing of its strength." Here, the text breaks off and the fragment begins. (Scholars will forgive this author's translation, which is drastically inferior to the work of the Red Book's original translator, Professor Tolkien.)

No one had expected Tarondor to ever wear the crown of Gondor, and he was unready for kingship. His reign was marked by great troubles; it was not until his own life was threatened by them

that he began to grow into the monarch that the land so sorely needed. The Plague left a great many homeless, and those that survived were driven to desperation and madness. Many said the Valar had forsaken Middle-earth at last. Laws and ancient customs kept since the arrival of the Faithful were abandoned, and the people were possessed of a frenetic gaiety even in the midst of death. Violent men arose to lead the mobs, and many innocents suffered under their thoughtless rule. The unnumbered refugees strained the kingdom's rulers, who found little support in a king who was not yet a man.

Royal pleasures were more important to Tarondor than governing his realm, and others followed his example. Evil and corrupt counselors, eager to steal from the royal treasury, surrounded him. The lords of Gondor's provinces chose to be masters of their own domains, ignoring royal commands. Unwilling to reduce the glory of his realm, Tarondor met every new trouble by raising taxes, though little of the money ever went to the purpose he intended. The lords of Ithilien and Anfalas were most contemptuous of the king. The prince in Minas Ithil garbed the royal army in the livery of his own house, and ignored commands to continue the watch on Mordor. Soldiers, unemployed, joined with bandits and other cruel men. They wandered the land, looting when they could not find pay for their swords. In time, the lords of Gondor were forced to hire them, and send them away where they would do harm only to the enemy.

It was in this time that bandits from across the Enedhwaith seized a caravan bound for Tharbad, and with it all the pay for the royal garrison there. Other bands, inspired by the success, imitated them. The garrisons of Orthanc and Harnost were drawn into battle, and the royal army at Tharbad very nearly disappeared altogether. Although the commander of the tower pleaded with the king and his ministers for aid, those few messages that reached Tarondor's ears were met only with disdain. The king had his eyes on far more fertile fields than the wight-plagued wilderness.

The line of Vidugavia, stalwart Northman allies and supporters of Anarion's line, had collapsed in the Plague, and now the horse-tribes fought amongst themselves for power. Those few heirs of Vidugavia who survived lived on in Minas Anor, and they pressed Tarondor for aid and a return to rulership, promising him a Northman bride and the inheritance of lands given to them by Tarondor's royal ancestor Romendacil. By this argument, and by the prospect of many Northmen rising in arms should he refuse, the king was swayed. He sent silver north, and gold, then weapons and finally armed men. In time, he found that he had sent an entire army.

Now the king was in his 27th year, and he wished to show proof of his manhood and of the noble blood in his veins. So it was that he called up an army of many diverse soldiers, took his place at its head, and journeyed to Rhovanion to put an heir of Vidugavia at the head of the horse-clans. But many of the greatest lords stayed behind, and those that went were careless and underestimated the strength of the Northman cavalry, so that Tarondor's army was shattered, the heir slain, and the king captured.

The road to Minas Anor was open, but the horse-lords wanted no part of that realm, and kept Tarondor prisoner against further invasion. The king proved blind to the lessons of his defeat. He found pleasure in his northern halls, and dismissed the governance of his own realm and the cries of his people. In time, unable to bear the cost of their royal guest and anxious to be rid of him, the horse-lords negotiated a ransom that was never fully paid and let him go.

For a time, Tarondor was content, but his need to triumph in battle had not been sated. He eyed an even grander conquest: the monuments of Umbar. Prompted by foolish and greedy counselors, and a dream that he claimed he alone could interpret, the king vowed to retake the haven from the Corsairs. For three years the invasion was planned, while ships were built and the army massed. The fleet set sail late in the year, and arrived at a shelter ruled by a Corsair well-bribed and friendly to the king. There, Tarondor learned that the politics of Umbar were many-sided and that its captains quarreled with each other, always just short of open war. For a year his army did nothing while the king struggled with the captains of Umbar, trying to forge an alliance that would see him all the way to the havens. In time he felt he mastered them, but his fragile compact fell apart. He fought three pointless battles on the road to Umbar before, his army shattered and the fleet sorely pressed, he abandoned the project and fled. It was during this time that Tarondor at last saw the folly to which his line had come, and when he returned to Minas Anor he aspired to be a king at last.

There were few good men left in Gondor by this time, but Tarondor drew them to him. He stripped his petty counselors of rank and title, casting them out of his domain. Although it grieved him, he hired the diverse companies of ruthless bandits that preyed on the people of his domain, and sent them into Ithilien and into the western vales, keeping what was left of his army to defend the borders. Only after many towns were burned, innocent people killed and left homeless, did the proud lords of Anfalas and Ithilien come to Minas Anor and bow before the king in homage.

The rest of Tarondor's reign was spent in this way: bringing to heel the unrepentant lords and rebuilding the army from disaster. In later days the mobs dispersed and the riots ceased, as the people came to see that their king had not forsaken them, and neither had Ilúvatar.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The *Red Book* cannot provide all the details that players in this new 17th century require. Additional plot seeds and information follow, focusing on each of seven social evils so common in the post-Plague years.

PLAGUE

Much has already been said on the Plague in ICE's published works. It was a physical malady, but the damage it left was also psychological. Many of its victims were convinced that the Valar had left them, and life was without meaning. In adversity, the common man became more ruthless, desperate and immoral. The Plague also crippled the royal house, seemed to strike hardest in Gondor's most crucial centers, and left the army prostrate. It was the direct cause of everything that followed.

WAR

In TA 1643, the princes of Cardolan defeated the Warlord in their midst. But no sooner had this been accomplished when Fiorel, the guiding hand to King Lanaigh of Saralainn, died of the Plague. Forced to

confront a new rebellion in his capital city, Lanaigh grieved privately and quickly. Able to keep his fragile military alliance together with loot from the Warlord's lair, and aided by a loan from Finduilas of Dol Caladir, the Daen potentate hired the Raggers, using them to re-take Sudúri from the peasant forces of the "Pseudo-Túrin" known as Olby.

Lanaigh and Finduilas had a curious relationship that strengthened over the next several years. Both felt intense pressure from Plague refugees and the wights that haunted their lands. What happened next was probably Lanaigh's idea, but the enchantress certainly supported it, for it seemed to serve her aspirations well. Sailing up the Greyflood in Caladirian vessels, Lanaigh led his own clan alongside Finduilas' Marcaich Chruaidh mercenaries across the river at Tharbad. The raid was originally meant simply as a "fishing expedition" along the Old South Road, but it succeeded beyond expectations, resulting in the occupation of Larach Duhnnan and the capture of a Gondorian shipment of silver bars (or "pigs," as they were commonly called by soldiers) intended as salary for the royal army in Tharbad. The result was the so-called "War of the Pigs."

Lanaigh handled the military side of the prolonged raid-cum-invasion, anxious to be away from the political entanglements of ruling his homeland and looking for another treasure as profitable as the first. Finduilas joined him on a few occasions, refining her manipulative skills by building an alliance of the local tribes of Dunfearan and cowing them with her magic. Her third visit turned out to be her last, however, when Gondorian troop movements forced the Saralainn warriors to withdraw from their base at Larach Duhnnan. But the groundwork for the migration into the Enedhwaith had been well-laid, and Lanaigh's men found temporary refuge with allies among the clans. A protracted series of skirmishes and sieges began, in which Lanaigh led raid after marginally-profitable raid on the Gondorian road, with the poorly-organized and undermanned Gondorian forces in the Enedhwaith trying to keep travel open and pin down an enemy that moved without roads or even discernible lines of supply. Gondorian interests in Tharbad demanded action, but the king blamed the garrison at Orthanc for the disruption, refused to send aid from Minas Anor, and threatened the commanders of the local troops with execution if they lost Tharbad. Meanwhile, the garrison of that city stepped to the edge of mutiny when they were unable to collect pay, and those few who would fight on credit had their hands full resisting the sudden push from Arthedain and Umbar to force Gondor out of the city altogether. The entire situation was balanced on a razor's edge, made worse by the increasing involvement of Cardolanian mercenary units, and no one was able to predict the outcome until the very end.

The second conflict to strike the Southkingdom during this time was the Rhovanion War. Northman families, given land by Eldacar in Gondor and now holding positions of great wealth and influence, pressed Tarondor to use the army to put an heir of Vidugavia back on the throne. In return, a daughter of the line would marry the king, and he would personally inherit the better part of the Northman lands (essentially reversing the endowments Eldacar had given; this was the price that the Northmen were willing to pay, assuming that they would have plenty of land to divide amongst them once the royal army was done in the north). Tarondor's involvement in Rhovanion was a sort of "Gondorian Vietnam;" he began by sending money, then veteran officers meant to rally, train and equip supporters among the horse-lords, but when this failed for obvious reasons it became necessary to send military force or lose all that had been invested. Tarondor himself led the invasion, with disastrous results. Needless to say, he never collected on that bridal promise.

During the years that he spent in prison, Gondor was ruled by a constantly- shifting mass of ministers, famous soldiers, well-spoken seers and greedy aristocrats. A few sought to stabilize the realm and preserve it for Tarondor's return; the vast majority just wanted to milk the royal treasury for as much as they could while the good times lasted.

Finally, Tarondor made his bid for Umbar, the eternal goal of every Gondorian monarch. Very little is known of the specific details of this invasion, save that the king's resources were squandered and, despite the efforts of a few well-meaning and experienced soldiers, great effort was expended for very little gain. In the end, Tarondor had to be satisfied with a treaty that allowed Gondorian merchants and pilgrims to visit the haven in relative safety. A series of battles whittled the army to a fraction of its might. Fortunately, the core elements survived, and it was possible for an older, wiser Tarondor to rebuild.

SCHISM

The rise of the "Pseudo-Túrin" known as Olby is a good example of the sort of messianic fanaticism that overtook many Gondorians in the Plague's aftermath. "The Forsaken," one of the larger such movements, is another example. During the mid 1640s, mobs in Osgiliath were driven into a frenzy by a tall, lanky Dúnadan calling himself "Mule." Citing the death of the Tree as his ultimate proof, Mule insisted that Ilúvatar and the Valar had completely abandoned the Faithful due to their pride and indulgence. They were in need of humility, and to abase himself Mule had given up his own name for that of a beast of burden. He insisted Gondorian society was without meaning or moral value, and encouraged his followers to take matters into their own hands. His message fell on receptive ears, and within a few months his movement had spread to nearby towns and cities on both sides of the river. Mule led the mobs in riots that toppled any symbol of pride and accomplishment, starting with rich buildings and proceeding to bridges, monuments, and even minor fortifications. In the process, neighborhoods and entire towns were looted, innocents were raped or murdered, and estates were burned. The people were possessed of a desperate madness, an utter disregard for social mores. Local magistrates tried to capture Mule, but he avoided them for over half a year, until finally he disappeared as quickly as he had come, and the Forsaken movement collapsed. Some whispered that he practiced dark sorcery, but the truth is that no one ever got close enough to him to be sure.

BAD GOVERNMENT

Traditionally, heirs to a Dúnadan kingship served for many years as administrators under their fathers or even grandfathers before taking the throne themselves. In the wake of the Plague, this system collapsed. Not only had Tarondor not been trained as a king, his branch of the family had never seriously considered the possibility. When he came to the throne, the heir was too young, whimsical, easily influenced by others, but also amazingly stubborn. His first goal upon assuming the crown was to consolidate power in his office, but the lesser lords rebelled and Tarondor proved too inexperienced in the command of an army to stop them. As he grew he became

only more convinced of his own privileged status; he waged war after pointless war, taxed the people into oblivion, and watched his realm fracture into its component parts.

Sadly, Tarondor was not alone. Nearly every lord, with only a handful of noteworthy exceptions, followed his lead and were exceeded in graft only by their disregard for the people whom they served. The process fed on itself; princes competed to backstab and double-deal. Naturally, it was the common people who suffered the most.

BRIGANDAGE

When the watch on Mordor ended, and the army was reduced to save expenses, thousands of soldiers were suddenly unemployed. These men were joined by the desperate and homeless whose families had died in the Plague, and also by bandits who found that lords would rather spend money on the luxuries of court than on securing the roads. Following the lead of Cardolan, mercenary companies formed, typically led by a single charismatic (and absolutely ruthless) individual. To feed and clothe themselves, the companies looted whatever village they came across, and by wintering in a town they effectively destroyed it by the thaw.

Although little more than glorified criminals, the mercenaries had to be dealt with, and in time even Tarondor hired them. It was he who eventually perfected the best strategy for dealing with the companies: hire them and send them to make war on your enemies, as far away as possible. No matter the cost, it was cheaper than letting them stay at home.

TAXES

Tarondor's answer to most problems was to spend money, and that meant more taxes. But tax levies to increase the size of the army, to make up for the interruption in moneys from independently-minded provinces like Ithilien, to rebuild and pay compensation to victims of the Forsaken, to pay mercenaries, deal with Plague and war refugees, and eventually even to pay the king's ransom, far exceeded the people's means. The rage and frustration felt throughout Gondor at these crippling taxes contributed to the "general madness." Many towns revolted, driving out or killing the king's men, and one of the best ways to secure the loyally of a town was to relieve it of taxes for a year, or just to promise that no new taxes would be initiated.

INSURRECTION

Beset by waves of refugees, and with their pleas for aid from the Crown falling on deaf ears, leaders in Ithilien, Anfalas, and other lands along the White Mountains took more and more of the government into their own hands. By the 1650s, these provinces were essentially independent, hiring sovereign militaries and paying them out of harsh taxes (which were no harsher, it must be said, than those elsewhere in the kingdom). Ithilien, in particular, was eager to abandon the pointless watch on Mordor, which consumed so much time and effort.

It took decades for Tarondor to bring these rebellious provinces back under full royal control. Such a victory was only achieved after years of diplomacy, massive bribes of land and gold, and even armed military raids. These raids were aimed at taking critical castles along travel routes, interrupting the flow of cash into rebellious treasuries, and sometimes threatening the rulers themselves. They were led by clever professional fighters loyal to the king (by this time, Tarondor had managed to build a corps of loyal commanders; although he matured as a ruler, he was never an impressive fighting man) and were made up of a combination of the King's Corps and the mercenary bands which ravaged the Southkingdom. It was Tarondor's hope, and the hope of his close companions, that the mercenary bands would be broken up in the fighting and, if they did survive, would at least prey on the rebels. The policy worked, after a fashion. Some suggest that the independent-minded provinces returned to the fold just so that the king would end the looting of these brigands.

CAMPAIGNING

The TA 1640 campaign described above differs in many respects from traditional Tolkien stories. It focuses less on Sauron and the actions of malevolent supernatural foes than on the greed and desperation in every human heart. There is a lack of epic sweep. This is intentional. By turning from a single great story to a number of important, but lesser, struggles, the GM provides more for players to do. However, players must also be careful not to lose sight of basic heroism in a setting as dysfunctional as this.

The obvious tactic is for the GM to place the players around a single powerful lord, one of those who is still honorable and loyal to the monarchy (if not the throne's current occupant). In this way, they will be able to preserve relative calm, and make their home a haven from the many hazards of war, banditry and mob rule. As the campaign matures, the heroes may be drawn into royal politics, participate in the Rhovanion War and help guide the realm during Tarondor's imprisonment.

Alternately, the GM can focus on the "Sauronic conspiracy," turning the Southkingdom's woes into a plot of Sauron or the Nazgûl. In this instance, Tarondor's dream of conquest in Umbar is sent by a manipulating sorcerer, the Saralainn raid finds the pigs due to a carefully placed spy for Sauron, Mule is leader of a Sauronic cult, etc. This sort of campaign also lends itself to another quest: finding the source of the Plague, described in Appendix A as "an ill wind." In what foul pit was this wind born? Is it of Sauron's making, or his master's? A company of brave and clever adventurers might be able to answer these questions, and bring back a cure.

Eventually, the players may prove to be the only people loyal to the king, and take on roles as mentors, guardians and confidantes to him. By the time that Tarondor returns from Umbar, they may find positions as Peers of the Realm, and help him reconstruct the realm through diplomacy, bribes and armed might.

CONCLUSION

It is no simple task to convert a literary locale to a game setting, and a place as big as Middle-earth is all the more challenging. When doing so, it is inevitable that the setting will be "stretched," as will the words of the author, but so long as nothing in the canon is directly contradicted, I consider the effort to be an honorable one. The result is a more confusing place, one where heroes and villains are perhaps not so clearly-drawn as MERP players are used to. Players and GMs run the risk of losing focus, just as the people of our own world did in the 14th century when the Black Plague destroyed their society. But in a setting such as this, heroes become all the more necessary. Good luck.

Rastarin's Log

Bridget Buxton: 40 Central Terrace, Kelburn, Wellington, New Zealand

CHAPTER FOUR:

TCBS GOES SOUTH

Departing the Vale of Morthond, Rastarin, Lytta, Clennan, Daeron, Rassimus and Telcontar begin the long journey back to Rastarin's ship, The Calm Before the Storm (TCBS), eager to bring the deadly secret of *naurnen* to the beleaguered cities of Dol Amroth and Pelargir. For Rastarin, too, there is an even more pressing obligation: the planned assignation with her archnemesis, Captain Hardon of the Black Serpent. Haste turns to urgency, however, when chance discovery at an old campsite reveals the body of a messenger earlier sent to inform TCBS of Rastarin's plans. Upon arriving at Dol Amroth their worst fears are confirmed. No message from Morthond has reached Prince Celdrahil, but Tarassis and his men passed through there only a few days ago, and Hardon's ship was later observed leaving the Corsair fleet accompanied by five smaller vessels. At dusk on Cerveth 29th they finally reach the cove where TCBS lies hidden, but the ship is dark and silent. Captain Hardon has preceded them! Cursing her imprudent message, Rastarin rushes down to find her crew pinned spread-eagled on the sand, where the Corsairs have left them to perish from heat and thirst. Four are already dead, among them the helmsman Caldir, with a bloody note nailed to his chest:

My dear Rastarin,

Your womanly scheme to entrap me had failed miserably. Perhaps this deed of mine which you now witness will motivate you to face me on the high sea, ship-to-ship, Storm to Serpent. Then at least I shall think it worth my while to watch you die by my hand. Yes, I can see that you pine for — indeed worship — the power that runs in my loins, but I'll have you know that I do not consort with members of the weaker sex such as yourself.

—Hardon

While her crew are being unbound and tended to, Rastarin gazes out to her dark and mournful ship and sighs. "Someone must go aboard TCBS to discover whether Hardon has left any lethal traps for us. It's a dangerous job, but somebody's got to do it — somebody who knows TCBS better than anyone else. And as captain of the ship, the task falls to me.. .to entrust to my first mate. Clennan?"

The ship is clean (luckily for Clennan) and the journey home is a time for reflection over the tumultuous events of the last few weeks. Rastarin decides to postpone delivering the Elendilmir to King Tarondor in favour of seeking information about her uncle Neithan and the Gwaedhelsword, a quest that leads TCBS back via Tolfalas to the Balimur Swamps. In the course of these adventures they learn that Neithan's last known destination was Fuinur's Well in the great desert south of Umbar, where he disappeared shortly after the Kin-strife. In the Balimur they obtain one of three parts of a small ornate device known as the Karajaz, a star-map for crossing the Mirror of Fire to Fuinur's Well. Neithan's trail now leads them south, and here they must part company with Daeron who is returning to Pelargir. Rastarin posts her excuses to Tarondor with vague promises of returning soon, unwilling to admit even to herself a strange reluctance to give up the Elendilmir has now come over her.

The next day TCBS sets sail for Umbar.

On 11th Úrui they come within sight of land: the barren coastline and looming cliffs of Umbar's cape. Rastarin searches her charts for a likely place to stop in and pick up fresh supplies. "Herod!" she says at last.

"Is that one of the Corsair cities?" Lytta asks.

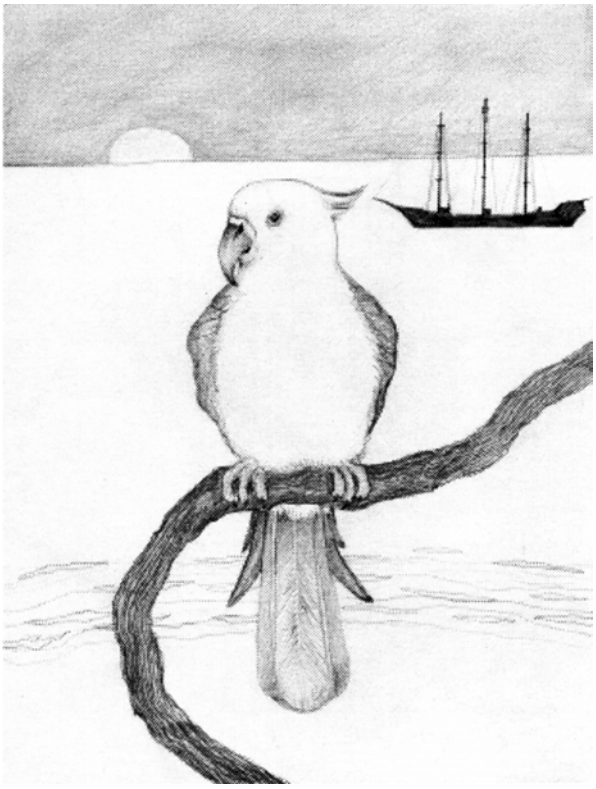
"Herod's not a city, he's a man. A Black Númenórean sorcerer, and just the sort who would know where to look for the missing pieces of our Karajaz. We used to do quite a lot of business together, before I...uh...well, I'm sure he's forgotten about that..."

"Do you trust him?" asks Rassimus doubtfully.

"No," Rastarin replies. "But he is my friend."

They arrive that evening at castle Vamag, Herod's fortress, and Rastarin cautions them before they leave the ship. "Herod has no love for Gondor or the Rebels in Umbar, but be careful how you speak. I wouldn't put it past him to steal the Elendilmir for himself if he learned that we have it." Rassimus remains dubious. "Are you sure that this is a good idea?"

"Don't worry about a thing!" laughs Rastarin. "Herod and I go way back." At the



gates of Vamag they are greeted by Herod's huge doorman Malik, who leads them through halls devoted to all manner of wealth and hedonism until they are brought before Herod himself. The Black Númenórean lord reclines on an opulent couch with his familiar Nubjub, a grotesque monkey with a wizened and preternaturally intelligent face. They notice that Herod appears pale and rather sick, and one of his hands wears a black glove and seems to twitch with a life of its own. Rastarin bows low, greeting him in the most obsequious and flattering terms, and introduces her companions.

"Ah yes," drawls Herod, yawning. "The dread pirate Rastarin. Now how could I forget her, after she sold me that adulterated worm's blood?" At these words Nubjub snarls, and Herod's gloved hand twitches violently. Rastarin does some fast-talking as her companions glance around uneasily at the large number of armed guards hovering in the shadowy recesses of the hall.

"...And of course, Lord Herod, as I have always said: if there is anything you desire in the way of compensation for this terrible accident, which resulted from circumstances quite beyond my control, you need only to name it."

"Very well," says Herod. "I desire that you should pledge your service to me in castle Vamag for one year...in my harem."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," Rastarin replies quickly, and tells Herod of her quest to find the Well of Fuinur and the Gwaedhel-sword. "Yet who knows what other artefacts of awesome power may lie beyond the Mirror of Fire?" she enthuses. "Join us, and a share of all this could be yours. What's more, it's a perfect opportunity for you and Nubjub to get out more, get some fresh air, and perhaps even turn over a new leaf. You could do something good for Middle-earth for a change, and a public service for your Númenórean kindred!"

"Yes!" cries Herod, becoming misty-eyed with emotion. "Finally, a chance to serve Middle-earth, and to give something back after this lifetime of apathy, acquisition and conspicuous consumption! I can see it now.. .Herod the Great! The Herod! Herod the Philanthropist! Aaaaah dear," he sighs, wiping a tear from his eye. "I think not."

"Would you settle for just going in and plundering the place, then?"

"It's a deal," he answers.

What's more, Herod possesses the second piece of the Karajaz, and with Lytta's somewhat reluctant help he summons a powerful spirit to discover the location of the third. It lies hidden in the catacombs under Eärnil's Tower in Umbar. TCBS drops the adventurers off in Umbar on the evening of Urui 15th with orders to return and pick them up on the 18th.

"Umbar," says Clennan with relish. "You will never see a more wretched hive of scum and villainy."

"I always liked this town," adds Herod.

Their first stop in Umbar is the Drunken Goose, where the beer and conversation always flow freely, scrumpy is seldom in short supply, and one never has to wait long for a good brawl to start up. Especially with Rastarin, who picks a fight with some drunks within minutes of entering and accidentally cuts her brassiere straps in the resulting melee. When things settle down a bit, Tirieth the proprietor provides them with some disturbing news: Gedron Moonstone, ally of Captain Hardon, has just sailed into port.

"The Laughing Reaver!" Rastarin scowls. "I swear that soon he shall laugh no more." But that is not the worst of it. Even now, Tirieth reports, one of Gedron's passengers is conferring with Sangahyandion's brother Arkhâd m the Tower of Eärnil—a shipwright from Pelargir by the name of Tarassis!

The companions are alarmed at the thought ofwhat the traitor may reveal to Arkhâd, and Herod suggests they hide out at the castle of Lord Mírëadur, one of his Umbarean friends. There they must preserve their disguise as Herod's Haruze servants, a fact the sorcerer takes shameful advantage of by ordering Rastarin and Lytta to perform numerous menial and humiliating tasks during Mírëadur's splendid banquet in his honour....

"I am NOT going to dance, you bastard," Rastarin hisses.

"Oooh, she's so shy," Herod laughs, and Mírëadur smiles indulgently. "Don't try to run away now!"

"I have to go shopping," Rastarin retorts coldly. "My Lord."

"Of COURSE, my dear," says Herod with an evil wink. "We must have supplies for the night's pleasures. This trip is turning out to be more enjoyable than I ever imagined !"

"I'm not going to forget this, Herod," Rastarin mutters darkly, storming out of the hall with her shopping basket. Herod catches her at the door. "Don't be so grumpy, Rastarin," he says. "Once Mírëadur gets me in to see Arkhâd, finding the Karajaz and disposing of Tarassis is going to be easy."

True to his word, Herod obtains an invitation to Eärnil's Tower for the following morning, where he goes accompanied by Telcontar and Nubjub. Together they are brought before Arkhâd, who is deep in conversation with Tarassis and an older man whose features suggest the blood of both Númenor and Harad. Herod recognises him at once as a sorcerer of great power, and notices that he, too, wears a single black glove on his right hand.

"Greetings to you, most honoured guests," the man says, bowing deeply. "Allow me to humbly present myself. I am Zimrakhil, Ambassador for the Southron Alliance, and I am, as always, by your command." Herod and Telcontar introduce themselves, and Nubjub, as instructed, seizes the opportunity to leap upon Tarassis and pluck out a few of his hairs. After

apologising for the excessive friendliness of his monkey, Herod expresses his desire for vengeance against Gondor, and he and Telcontar are invited to join 'the cabal'.

"Then meet us here at the dark of the moon in two weeks time, and you shall be bound into our order with oaths and ties of blood," Arkhâd promises. They part with courteous words, and on the way out Nubjub slips off to explore the tower. Unfortunately, the monkey is not able to discover any obvious access down to the catacombs where last piece of the Karajaz lies hidden.

At nightfall the parry re-assembles at the Drunken Goose and exchanges the day's news. Rastarin is still anxious, for if Tarassis has told Arkhâd about her commission from Tarondor, the TCBS may be in great danger when she returns to Umbar on the 18th.

"I told you not to worry about Tarassis," sniffs Herod, producing the hairs.

"With these I can destroy him any time I please."

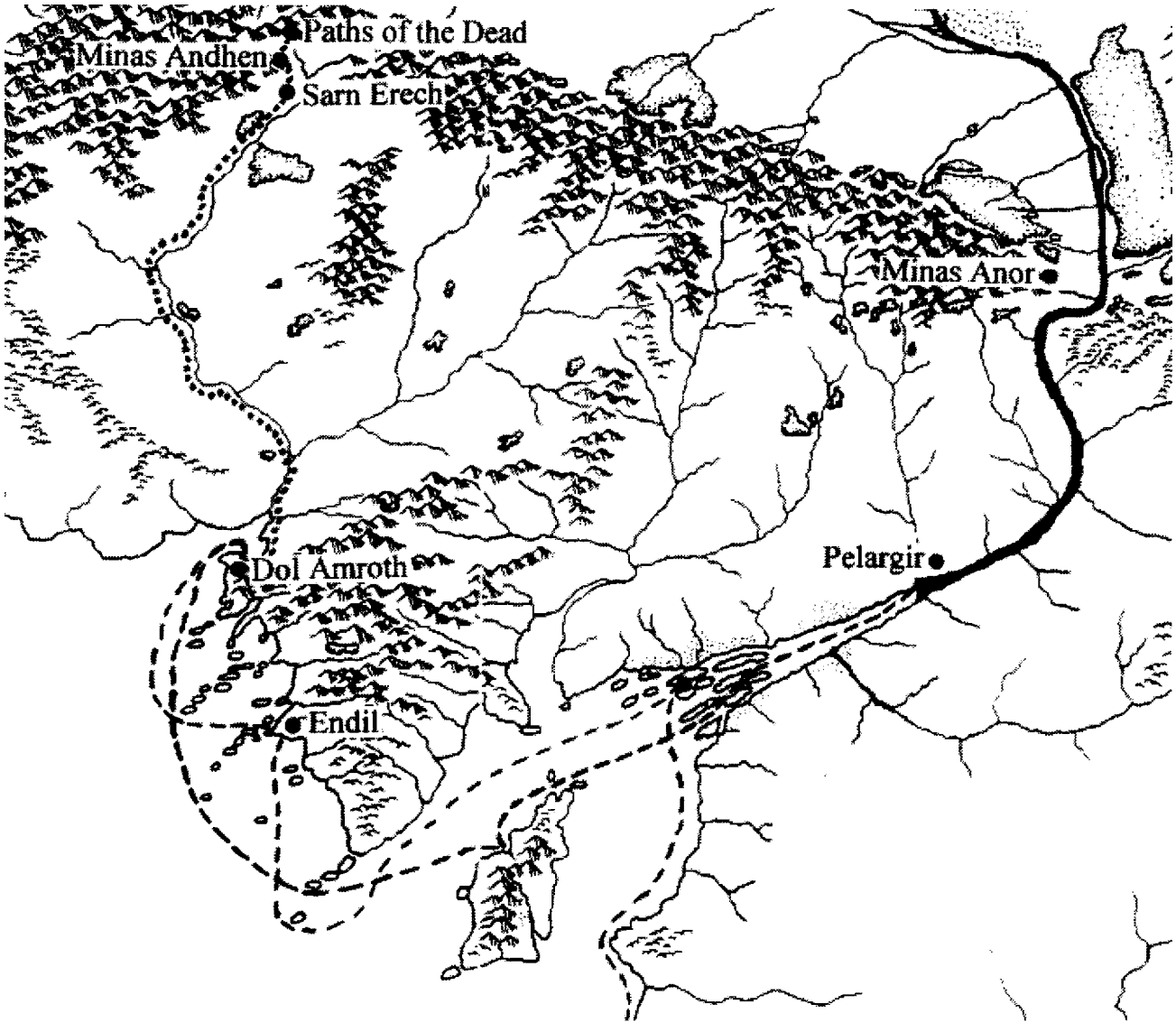
But the most urgent problem remains recovering the missing piece of the Karajaz. Tirieth comes to the rescue, and introduces them to Captain Delbo, an old alcoholic who knows (he claims) a secret way under Eärnil's Tower. They arrange to meet him on the docks at midnight the following evening.

"On time and sober, if you don't mind," Rastarin adds without much confidence.

They have been drinking steadily for some time when suddenly who should show up but Rastarin's old 'friend' Gedron, who is given something to really laugh about when he receives the dread spoon of justice through both eye sockets. There follows a bar fight of epic proportions when the Reaver's crew join in the drunken fray and Clennan warms things up with a few bottles of *naurnen*. "Another time, Captain!" cry the singed survivors, as they scatter into the maze of Umbar's twisting streets.

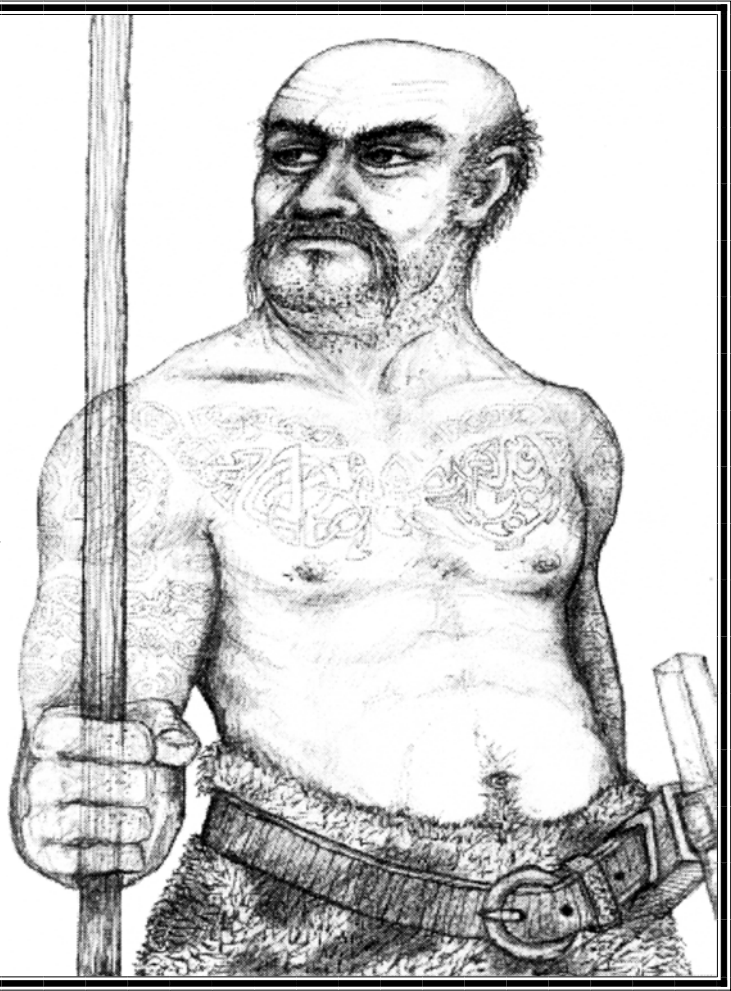
"Well, this is just great," complains Rastarin when they re-assemble in the parlour to patch up their wounds. "Now Tarassis will have Umbar's Council of Captains thinking I'm a Gondorian spy, and I've blown my only disguise. I haven't got a ship, Hardon's men know I'm still in town, TCBS is going to come sailing into their open arms the day after tomorrow, and the only man who can help us get the Karajaz is probably too drunk to remember who we are!"

"Hey, I haven't forgotten," slurs a drunken voice, and they see Captain Delbo rise from a corner of the tavern with a pint of scrumpy in hand. He laughs and tries to approach but promptly trips up over his own feet. The adventurers all take a triple shot of scrumpy, and wonder what to do next...



Thus spoke Malbethh the Seer, in the days of Arvedui, last king at Fornost

Over the land there lies a long shadow,
westward reaching wings of darkness.
The Tower trembles; to the tombs of kings
doom approaches. The Dead awaken;
for the hour is come for the oathbreakers:
at the Stone of Erech they shall stand again
and here there a horn in the hills ringing.
Whose shall the horn be? Who shall call them
from the grey twilight, the forgotten people?
The heir of him to whom the oath they swore.
From the North shall he come, need shall drive him:
he shall pass the Door to the Paths of the Dead.



The Oathbreakers is an Other Hands Supplement for incorporating the Men of the White fountains into your MERP campaign. It details all 15 clans of the Daen Coentis, cursed by Isildur to sleepless death, and includes complete MERP/RM stats for more than 50 NPCs.

The price of this publication wall be heavily influenced by printing costs,which in turn hinge on the number of copies printed. The more copies, the cheaper they will be. So, if *The Oathbreakers* sounds like something you would like to own a copy of, please contact me so that I can add you to the tally.

The Oathbreakers is already in production. Publication is expected to take place late in the Fall of 1998. Updates will be mailed to those who express interest in obtaining a copy.

Chris Seeman: 415-892-9066 (chrisl224@aol.com)

THE OATHBREAKERS

Fine Print

Other Hands is an international gaming journal devoted to fantasy role playing set in J.R.R, Tolkien's secondary world of Middle-earth. It is a quarterly, nonprofit publication welcoming submissions dealing with any aspect of gaming in the context of Tolkien's world: scenario ideas, rule suggestions, gaming product reviews, gamemastering aids, bibliographic resources, essays on Middle-earth, and whatever else our readership would like to see in print. In a word, *Other Hands* aims to be the definitive Tolkien-related gaming journal for a worldwide role playing community. Within the pages of *Other Hands*, the interested gamer may publish materials with reference to any game mechanics he or she chooses (including *Rolemaster* and *Middle-earth Role Playing)*. Such gaming material may deal with any time period of Tolkien's world, and need not be bound to what has already seen print in Iron Crown's modules. *Other Hands* provides this freedom because it is a nonprofit publication. Subscription rates are as follows: USA/Canada ($6.25/Issue), South/Central Amerca ($6.75), UK/Europe ($7.25), New Zealand/Australia ($7.75), For other zones, contact Chris Seeman. Payment should be made to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213 Novato, CA 94948, USA. No Eurochecks, please! Submissions are welcome in any from (preferably legible), but we prefer if you can to send a file. We use Word for Windows. If there is any question as to the readability of your file, please save it in ASCII or text-only format and include a hard copy. All submissions must be sent to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948 [USA]. Please write me or call if you have any difficulties. My phone number is [415] 892-9066. Please note also that I may be reached on-line at: **chrisl224@aol.com.**